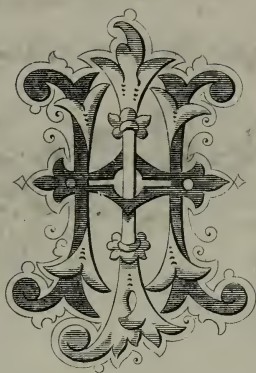




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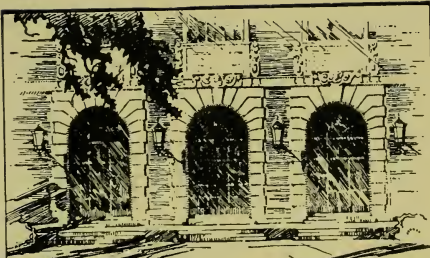
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GAYTHORNE HALL

A Novel

BY

JOHN M. FOTHERGILL

'Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours,
And ask them what report they bore to heaven,
And how they might have borne more welcome news.'

YOUNG.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1884.

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TO

Oliber Wendell Holmes,

IN ADMIRATION OF HIS WRITINGS AND

REGARD FOR HIS WORTH

THIS WORK IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

George Fay 1 May 57 11.44/2Kc=30

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GAYTHORNE HALL.

CHAPTER I.

ENOUGH TO MAKE A SQUIRE SWEAR.

‘——! It is surely not true!’

It was a full round oath such as an old-fashioned Squire of hasty temper would be likely to utter under intense feeling. It was all the more significant from the fact that Squire Wharton was not in the habit of swearing, fashionable still at that time.

‘It is those bloodthirsty Chartist fellows that have done the foul deed. Some of those scoundrels that attend meetings when they ought to be at work; who cry down the Corn Laws instead of trying to honestly earn the bread they eat. And now they

add murder, cold-blooded murder, planned and carried out in cold blood, to their arguments. I wonder what Nephew Jack will say to this? "Peace, Law, and Order!" Yes; that is a fine motto! But midnight murder scarcely tallies with it. Poor Tom! as honest a fellow as ever breathed. To be shot like a dog! It is enough to make one swear, though I am ashamed of myself for doing so. Confound it! I'll have some of them hanged for it. I can't bring the poor fellow to life again; but I can do my duty by him. I can see that the villains are brought to justice. I'll spare no money, and no pains. They can come and burn Gaythorne Hall over my head and me in it; but that is not a prospect likely to frighten an old soldier from his duty. I don't care what they may threaten. I'll let them see they shall not go on in riot, and murder, and violence. It is a thousand pities the Government don't suspend the Habeas Corpus Act, and declare martial law in the land. We might then do something

to put down this lawlessness. But a white-livered, mealy-mouthed Whig Government will do as little as possible to protect their loyal subjects. I wish the Duke were in power !’

Here the Squire ceased his invective for a moment while the messenger who brought the news stood trembling, uncertain whether to go or stay ; afraid to move, yet scarcely daring to remain. Mrs. Allonby, the Squire’s housekeeper, stood still, apparently also uncertain what to do in the presence of such unwonted passion. She evidently was at a loss how to proceed ; and in doubt whether a remark would soothe her master, or rouse him to another outburst. Like a prudent person she followed the old counsel — when in doubt do nothing ! So she stood silent and motionless, waiting to see what would happen.

‘The vile, cowardly assassins,’ broke out the Squire after a brief silence. ‘To shoot the man from behind a fence ! A Red Indian’s trick all over. I did not think

Yorkshire the place for such a deed. It is that cursed Sheffield, where they think so little of murder. It always has been so. Some of those wild beasts in human form who delight in bloodshed. Poaching and rioting, arson and murder. This is what we are coming to! And then when they carry their Charter they will soon confiscate property. Let the multitude get the upper hand, and we shall have the French Revolution over again. Mob-law! That is the blessed end that nephew Jack and these peaceful, radical, reforming, moral-force Chartist fellows are after. Well: this is a part of the beginning. Torchlight processions, armed mobs. That is the gospel of peace! Such cant! Chartism is nothing more than the rule of lawlessness. The man who has nothing shall share with the man who has something. Very likely; but I am not a convert to that doctrine. I have something: and I'll spend some of it to avenge poor Tom's murder. I'll swear I will!

No one that knew Squire Wharton had

any doubt about his keeping his word. Indeed 'I have said it and I'll do it' was a favourite expression of his. And in this matter there could be no questionings that this rule would be carried out. His eye gave evidence of his earnestness, quite as unmistakable as the tones of his voice. 'I swear it; and I'll do it. Poor Tom's blood shall not cry up in vain!'

Passion is a fearful thing to behold. Even a little child convulsed with rage is a shocking sight; but when an elderly man is shaken with anger it is a sight which fills one with sadness, blended with a sense of fear. The distorted features, the unwonted tones, the sheer *abandon* of the moment, combine to produce an effect which is as awe-inspiring as it is revolting. The messenger's alarm now became so intense and obvious that Mrs. Allonby felt that at least she must ask if he might go. So she took advantage of a momentary lull to ask:

'May the messenger go now, sir?'

‘Go ? certainly. Let him go into the kitchen, I may want to ask him some questions. He must stay awhile.’

The messenger lost no time in availing himself of the permission to leave the room : and to the end of his days he used to tell of the fear that fell on him through the Squire’s thunderstorm of passion.

‘Yo’ may go that loikes to tell th’ Squire his gamekeeper’s shot i’ th’ woods. I’ll go no moore !’ he would assert after he had recited the affair. ‘I wor’ glad to get to th’ kitchen, I can tell yo’ !’

After the messenger had left the room the Squire broke out again ; but the outburst was less violent.

‘Sit down, Mrs. Allonby, sit down : what are you standing there for ? Are you surprised I am in a passion ? Such a passion as you have never seen before. Well, I can’t help it when I think of poor Tom Earnshaw shot from behind a hedge. The cowardly assassins ! If it had been a

fair fight where he could have had a chance for his life, I would not have minded so much. It would have been bad enough for me to have lost the faithful fellow; and for him to have lost his life! But it would have been better than this. Shot from behind a fence, as he was walking along the edge of the wood! Lying out all night in the rain; while his wife was wondering what ever had happened him. Looking after poachers, I dare say she thought. Tom never shirked his duty. He didn't lie in the blankets while the thieving poachers fetched the pheasants down out of the trees. That was not Tom's way of earning his wages. He was a true-hearted, honest fellow as ever broke bread!'

Mrs. Allonby watched the gradual stilling of the storm in motionless silence. She was mistress of Gaythorne Hall to all intents and purposes in ordinary times, and under everyday circumstances. But, now, she knew her place; and kept it!

'He had his enemies, Tom had; like

every man that does his duty. He hated a poacher as a terrier hates a rat. The rat hates the terrier in turn; and the poachers have paid him out. Yes; and I'll pay them out for this!' continued the Squire. 'He has got a lot of them into trouble at time and time: and I dare say while they were in prison they planned how to do for him. And they have done for him too! Stone-dead and cold, when he was found, with the gun beside him at half-cock. It had not gone off when he fell. He could have had no suspicion of what was going to happen?'

'None whatever, it seems, from what Tunstall says,' replied Mrs. Allonby, understanding from the Squire's tones that he wished her to speak. 'It's very dreadful!'

'And the queer thing is, no one heard a shot fired. It was a close, thick night; when did it begin to rain?'

'The rain began about five: it was dark soon.'

'I suppose the villains had just light

enough to see to shoot by. It was a dastardly foul scheme; to escape into the wood if any one had happened to hear the shot, and come to see what it was about.'

The Squire was now passing into that comparative calm which follows a storm—a calm which will soon in its turn give way to action, however; a period of quiescence, when the forces are gathering for new activity. His brain was busy forming—not resolves, they were already taken; but schemes, devising the measures that were to be adopted; for he had been a soldier, and was ready of resource and prompt to act. After a period of silence, he commenced: 'The first thing to be done is to have the ground searched to see if any traces of the scoundrels can be made out. The next thing is to offer a reward without delay. Times are bad; but I will give two hundred pounds to any one who will tell us the murderer's name, or point him out. That ought to tempt some one to tell out. Any one but the man that pulled the trigger ought to

jump at it. He could go away and start life afresh on that. Tell Tunstall I wish to see him again, Mrs. Allonby !' The housekeeper did as she was requested, and brought Tunstall back into the room ; after that taking up a position beside her master's chair. Tunstall had obeyed the order in fear and trembling ; and could hardly be persuaded to revisit the Squire, until thoroughly assured that his rage was greatly spent. With some persistence Mrs. Allonby induced him to pluck up courage enough to face the Squire. If it had been a fight, a tussle with men in his own rank in life, Ned Tunstall would never have flinched for a moment ; but he had the awe for his master which such a servant of that time felt. His master belonged to a totally different class in life ; which he had always been brought up to look up to as his betters. He went in considerable fear of the Squire at all times ; and that outburst of passion had simply frightened him. To have entered

the Squire's own rooms would have been a serious matter to him under any circumstances ; but as it was, his courage forsook him. It was evident agony to him to stand where he was ; and the Squire observed it.

‘The first thing to be done, Tunstall, is to examine the place to see if there is any paper that has been used for wadding ; that might tell us much. Then see if there are any footprints ; though I fear the rain will have washed all traces away, unless there is some clay not covered by leaves : it's a chance, but try it. Then see if there is a piece of rag on any thorn near. When a man is in a hurry he is very apt to get a tear, and a bit of his clothes is left behind. That is a tell-tale the Indians always looked for carefully. If you find any bit of cloth, don't take it down at once : look, and see how it hangs, and how it has been torn. You can't put it back as you find it if once you shift it. Bulman has got the rheumatics ; get old

Jim Woodcock to go with you. He is as cunning as a fox ; and though he is one of those cursed Chartists, Jim is no "physical force" man. He'll help you. You two will see as much as ten men, and not tread about so much. Tell old Jim there is to be two hundred pounds reward. That will give him an interest in the search. Go at once, before it gets known, and a crowd gathers, till you can find nothing, and all traces of footsteps are lost.'

Ned listened as attentively as the state of his faculties would permit. His natural acumen enabled him to follow the Squire, and to see the points he put. In fact Ned's respect for his master was raised to that pitch on seeing how quickly his rage had passed into collected thought, that he held him ever after as almost more than human. When telling the tale of his fright in after days he never forgot to describe his wonderment at the Squire's clear orders after so brief an interval.

He did not need to be told to go twice ; and set off for old Jim Woodcock's as fast as his legs could carry him. Jim was a cobbler and a strong politician ; and a man of keen wit, and shrewd good sense to boot. He listened to the story of the finding of poor Earnshaw, the taking of his body into his cottage ; and then of the Squire's passion, and his after directions, without comment.

'Odds wunds, man ! but it's a grievous tale yo' tell. The Squire 'll be rare an' mad, I'se warrant yo'. Let's be gooin'. If we can du enny good the suiner we're after it the better,' replied old Jim at last. 'Let's be off ;' falling, as most men do who speak a vernacula, rinto the dialect all the more strongly when under emotion.

They set off together to the scene of the murder. It was a long pasture running alongside the wood which formed Squire Wharton's main preserve. It was an extensive wood, well stocked with pheasants and ground game ; and consequently was

the object of poor Earnshaw's best attentions. A stout holly-fence, common in that part of the country, formed the boundary betwixt the pasture and the wood. The wood consisted largely of comparatively young oak trees; and the undergrowth of hazel with a few blackthorns and briars, was pretty thick. The assassin had chosen the place well, for the holly-fence screened him perfectly from his victim; and also from any one who might, by any accident, have seen Earnshaw fall, and come to see what was the matter. The fence was unbroken for three or four hundred yards, and if some one had been attracted to the spot, the assassin could have escaped into the brushwood and been lost in the shades of evening, long before any pursuer could have got round the end of the holly-fence into the wood. All this the two noted carefully, and commented on the cunning displayed in the manner of the deed. Here and there near the fence were clumps of gorse; and it was close to one of these that Earnshaw

fell when shot. Had any one heard the shot and looked towards the direction of the sound, the body on the ground would scarcely have been distinguishable from the dark gorse. The close dark night, with impending rain, made it most unlikely that any one would be about. Earnshaw was very fond of sauntering along the edge of the wood in an evening, and if a rabbit showed itself to bag it; but he never allowed his dogs to accompany him in this stroll, as they disturbed the game too much. Consequently there was no dog to give any alarm. Whoever had done the deed was evidently very familiar with his habits.

At last they came to the place where the body was found. A patch of bloody grass told where the blood had soaked into the ground; and the heavy rain had washed it so that no clots had formed. The grass, too, still bore the impression of the form that had rested on it for some fourteen hours. When Tunstall had gone to look for Earnshaw, he had got quite close to

the body before he discerned it. The face wore that calm which is found in death from a gunshot-wound. When the cause of death is a sword or bayonet-wound, the features still wear in death the expression they bore when the fatal wound was received. A gunshot is unseen; and the features are comparatively expressionless. Tunstall was surprised to find him lying calm on his left side: his gun, which he had been carrying in his arm, lying under him. His velvet coat was soaked with rain; and its collar was torn with shot, and stained with blood. The neck showed a ragged wound beneath the ear. It was evidently made with a charge of shot. The murderer had obviously taken a deliberate aim from behind the fence and shot him at a short distance, thus making sure of his object. The shot tore through the large blood-vessels of the neck, and he must have rapidly bled to death. It was skilfully planned altogether; both with a view to the success of the deed

and the escape of the murderer; and so both of the men felt. After having surveyed the ground carefully in search of any piece of paper which had been used as wadding in the loading of the weapon, to their surprise none could be discovered. The matter was debated whether the assassin had come round and removed the paper after it had fallen, or not. This hypothesis was rejected as impossible. To do this he must have returned in the dark, and so cunning a villain would never have exposed himself along that long, impenetrable fence; and would have had to have used a light. It was next conjectured that he might have used some dry leaves or grass, which would be blown completely to pieces by the explosion. Then the fence was examined; there were no marks of gunpowder anywhere, and no leaves had been torn by shot. The wonderment of the searchers waxed greater and greater. They then placed a mark on the top of the fence, so as to recognise the precise

spot from the inside of the hedge; and having done this, they went away to the entrance of the wood. Tunstall easily made his way along the rides of the wood till they approached the scene of the murder. Here he plunged into the underwood, and soon found the mark they had placed on the fence. They then searched narrowly everywhere; but nothing betrayed the recent presence of man. The grass was long and tangled, covered with fallen leaves. If these had been recently disturbed, the heavy rain had obliterated every trace of such disturbance. The underwood around was mainly hazel; there were neither thorns nor briars near, consequently no rag of clothing could be expected. They then looked for footprints, but in vain. The weather had been fine for a day or two and the ground was hard, so that there were no footprints; at least that an English eye could detect. Perhaps the Red Indian or the native of Australia could have found

them readily ; but there were no traces the two Yorkshire men could find, though they searched carefully and long.

‘I’m feared we’re goin’ to find nought, Ned,’ said old Woodcock at last. ‘I’m fair beaten. He’s known what he’s bin doin’, the chap ’at planned this job.’

‘Aye, that he hes. But we mun try a bit longer. Th’ Squire ’ll be anxious to know that all’s bin done.’

But no further search availed them anything. It was quite clear that the villain had thought the matter well over, and taken care to make no oversight ; fully impressed that in murder it is only the blunderers who get caught. There was no clue to be found, and very unwillingly the two gave up their efforts. Retracing their steps, they left the wood, and returned to where the body was found. It was useless to look for anything there. There were to be seen the marks made on the wet ground by Tunstall and the others who helped him to carry the body of the

murdered man to his cottage ; but these were unimportant.

‘I’m feard we’ll hev to give up the job,’ exclaimed Woodcock, evidently greatly chagrined at their failure. ‘Whativver will th’ Squire say, does t’ think?’

‘I’ll noan go and see,’ replied Ned. ‘I’s e not forgit in a hurry t’ scene this mwornin’. Ye mun gang yersen, Jim ; I daren’t!’

All the old cobbler’s persuasive powers were unequal to inspiring Tunstall with the courage to face the Squire again. So he set off by himself to announce the failure of all their efforts.

He was shown into the Squire’s room, where the inmate was still fuming, his rage having but partially subsided. His condition was that of the sea after a storm. As the waters seethe in restless unquiet, so the old Squire’s mind was perturbed and uneasy. He felt that if he could only get some trace of the murderer, some hope or prospect of bringing him to justice, of

avenging poor Earnshaw's death, he could be somewhat pacified. He had great hopes that the searchers would find some evidence which might point out the assassin. But his hopes were dashed to the ground by Woodcock's report.

'Are you quite sure, Woodcock, that you took every pains; that you have neglected nothing?'

'As sure as I am that I'm standin' here afore you. We sought ivverywhere, and could find nought—neither rag nor foot-step. He was owre-cunning to leave a single evidence o' any kind.'

'That's very extraordinary,' replied the Squire. 'It seems to have been some one who was quite familiar with Earnshaw's ways, and the ground; who has laid his plans very skilfully. Indeed, he must have surveyed the ground very carefully; both as to the certainty of killing the poor fellow and escaping afterwards.'

'That he has, sir. He's non' goin' to be

caught if he can help it. He's a crafty villain.'

'You are right there, Woodcock. You know all the "physical force" men among the Chartists round here: who do you think has done it? I know you have no sympathy with the "physical force" men.'

'Not I, sir. I'm only too sorry that these rough chaps hav' joined us. They'll only bring discredit on the party, and do it harm i' the end. But are you sure, sir, that the Chartists have done it?'

'Who else would be likely to have done it? No one on the other side would have injured Earnshaw. Why, with the winter coming on, every friend of order felt Tom to be invaluable. He hated a Chartist as he did a poacher; indeed they were the same to him. These "physical force" men are all a lot of ruffians, who if they are only defying the law are happy. It must have been one of them that owed poor Tom a grudge; and perhaps wanted him out of the way. If they are planning some mid-

night outrages, some more rick-burnings, Tom was just the man they would want to get rid of; the villains! I wonder respectable men like you and my nephew, who ought to know better, countenance such lawlessness. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, both of you: though the case is worse with him than with you. He has a vote; he does not need to seek one. You haven't one, and naturally want one. But I don't think pikes and riots, lawlessness and outrage, shooting men from behind a fence, the road to the franchise; or indeed to any of the points of the Charter.'

This was rather unfair to Woodcock, who deprecated violence as much as any of the opponents of Chartism, and who raised his voice against it at every opportunity.

'I think you are rather hard upon us, sir. I am sure that the real reformers seek to attain their ends by legal measures; the "physical force" men are only drawbacks to our cause. We regret violence, and speak against it as much as you or any

other magistrate can. I don't think you are just to us "moral force" Chartists, that wish to do all legally. "Hold fast by the laws," old Major Cartwright used to say; and we hold with him. I'm sure, sir, I am as sorry as you are. I am sorry about poor Tom Earnshaw; and I am sorry that this has happened, for the sake of the cause; his language rising with his subject.

The Squire felt the old man's rebuke, and his natural generosity prompted him at once to apologise.

'I am sorry I said what I did, Woodcock. You are right, it was not quite fair to charge you and your party with abetting violence; I was unjust. But then I am under great provocation.'

'That's true,' replied the old reformer. 'You've been greatly tried, sir, and provoked; and I'm sorry we've been unable to find any trace of the scoundrel. We did our best, I can assure you.'

'I am sure you did, Woodcock, and I am very much obliged to you. My grati-

tude will take another form than words. I shall not forget your ready help in this terrible trouble that has come upon us. Do you think a reward might bring anything out ?'

'It's well worth tryin', sir. But I'm feared this is a single-handed job ; an' if he keeps his own counsel he's safe.'

'Well, we must try, and see what it will do. Good morning, Woodcock.'

The old Chartist was turning to go, when he halted, saying,

'If it's bin done by the "physical force" men hereabouts, Dan Appleyard will know something about it.'

'Do you say so ?' the Squire said eagerly. 'Then the reward may do some good.'

CHAPTER II.

THE WHARTONS.

THE old Squire's efforts remained barren of result. The only effect of the reward was to arouse the anger of his turbulent neighbours, the 'physical force' Chartists. It came somehow to Dan Appleyard's ears that the reward was supposed to be related to him in particular; and conscious of his innocence and his ignorance on the matter, Dan felt very much injured. People who know that they are not beyond suspicion on many matters, can usually be specially virtuous and indignant when they do chance to be charged unjustly. Dan might never have coveted a pheasant, or listened to a Chartist speaker, to judge by the wails he sent up at being supposed to be cognisant of the perpetrator or perpetrators of Tom Earnshaw's

murder. It was a dastardly deed, was agreed on all sides.

The inquest was held ; Ned Tunstall and Jim Woodcock said what they had to say, and were complimented by the coroner on the pains they had taken and the intelligence they had displayed in the matter ; but the verdict was—‘ Wilful murder : but by whom committed there is no evidence to show.’

The matter soon ceased to be actively debated ; but the Squire did not stand alone in his opinion that the murder was the work of some of the lawless fellows who joined the ranks of the Chartists, and who would join any movement directed against the Government, or those in authority : men who cared only to oppose law and order, and recked not under what banner they arrayed themselves, so long as they were in revolt against the ruling powers. They were the bane of the Chartists. Those who were true to the matter of reform as a cure for the evils around them, and who, like

Jim Woodcock, honestly believed that in the Charter they had a panacea for the national troubles; and those of the upper classes who sympathised with them, regarded the 'physical force' men as more injurious to their cause than their avowed enemies, Whig or Tory. To this last class, namely, those socially above the Chartists (who were mainly belonging to the wage-class), who sympathised with them, or, in their own words, held that 'the earth was made for the many, and not for the few,' belonged the old Squire's nephew Jack; his heir in default of a lawful son of his own.

It may now be well to see what kind of folks the Whartons were. They were gentlefolks; a younger branch of the great Wharton family of the North, whose attachments to the Stuarts cost them so dear. The Bibles and prayer-books still distributed yearly over the old manors of the Whartons, which have passed into other hands, keep the memory of the family, if not green, still in remembrance. These Whartons had

had of later years Whig leanings, and the old Squire of Gaythorne Hall, who died in 1801, was a Whig. He had married a Miss Rolleston, the daughter of another Yorkshire squire, who died before him in 1790. Both families were old, highly respected, and though without titles, belonged to the rank of the county families; among whom many a plain squire holds a prominent position in Yorkshire. From their union sprang three boys—Charles, born in 1772; Edward, born in 1775; and Francis, born in 1778. There were no girls. The Wharton property was a handsome one, free from incumbrance, so that there was no need for any economy; and Gaythorne Hall, the family residence of the Whartons, was known for its plenty of everything to eat and drink; both with the family and the domestics. Beef and ale were to be found there in no stinted quantities. Neither the Squire nor his wife cared to travel, and consequently they were profuse at home. They of course

observed the rule of saving a certain portion of their income yearly for their children; but three sons and no daughters were a family, measured by a Yorkshire standard, which called for little thrift or forethought; these boys could easily be provided for. The eldest would of course have the estate; Edward would be a soldier; and Francis be a clergyman, or enter the navy, according to the tastes he might develop as he grew up. It was necessary to provide for their education: to give Charles an eldest son's allowance while his father lived; to buy Edward a commission, and supplement his pay, so that he could live as became a Wharton; and to make provision for the future needs of Francis. But all this rather furnished material for Squire Wharton and his wife to talk about, than necessitated that self-denial of which so much was heard and so little seen.

Mrs. Wharton's dower consisted of £7000, well invested in shares in the Aire

and Calder Canal Company; and the high rate of interest which they paid enabled her to save a sum yearly which would provide Edward with all he would require. So they lived easily without anxiety, and were happy: perhaps happier than many of their neighbours who found London in the season an irresistible attraction, and Bath in the winter almost a necessity.

The Whartons stayed at home: the Squire looked after his property and his tenants; while his lady looked after the poor.

The farmers prospered; they had ready markets for their corn, their butter, their fat cattle in the neighbouring towns of Barnsley and Sheffield; and the labourers shared in their prosperity. The parish of Brigstone, on the high ground which slopes up to the moors lying betwixt Lancashire and Yorkshire, was a model rural parish. Its south-eastern lip touched the famous Satanstoe collieries, where the coal comes almost to the surface, and so was easily worked.

But the border-scrap of the parish was allied to Satanstoe in every respect : and knew nothing of its connection with Brigstone except by the collection of the rates ; and the facts that its denizens went to Brigstone to marry, to bury, and to christen. As a matter of fact, Brigstone was a strictly agricultural parish. The village itself had, besides the rectory, two taverns, a large house where dwelt the solicitor, who was also Squire Wharton's man of business ; a less pretentious house tenanted by the village doctor ; a farrier of local repute ; and the usual craftsmen—smith, carpenter, mason, shoemaker, and tailor, found in all village communities. The Whartons were the family of the parish, and occupied the high-railed pew in the parish church. Except the rector, the solicitor, and the doctor, all were home products—sons of the soil of Brigstone. Every man knew all about his neighbour ; every woman was familiar with the smallest details in the lives of her gossips. Lying away from the

great industrial fields of Yorkshire, it turned its back on Lancashire; consequently received no incomers, who had their own private reasons for leaving their native places: such sought rather the manufacturing towns. From this Mrs. Wharton had the satisfaction of knowing precisely who and what kind of persons the recipients of her bounty were.

Mrs. Wharton's fortune, by some whim upon her father's part, was settled upon her; and after that upon her first female grandchild, no matter by which of her own children. Until the first female grandchild came of age the income of the shares was to be enjoyed by the holder of the estate: it being enjoined that it was expected he would make the girl, while a minor, an appropriate yearly allowance; but this was optional, and no amount was suggested. As to any other grandchildren, male or female, their parents must provide for them, as seemed fit unto themselves. Under the settlement the income fell to

the old Squire on his wife's death in 1790. When he followed her in 1801, his eldest son Charles drew the interest; and a very comfortable addition to his own income he found it. It enabled him to continue an allowance to Edward beyond what he inherited under his father's will; and to continue Francis at Cambridge with ample funds. He was a right brotherly brother: and as his own tastes were strictly squirely, he had enough for himself and to spare. His pride made him very sensitive about the position of the Whartons; and as his own position was beyond dispute, his anxieties lay with his brothers and their respective positions. Consequently he was generous to them to an unusual extent. His dog, his gun, his fishing-rod, his roadster, were the objects of his thoughts; as to the carriage-horses, they were the business of the coachman. A kindly genial Squire, fond of a rubber of whist, and a glass of good port: that was his character. He attended the petty sessions, but was scarcely

an active magistrate. Consequently he developed a latent tendency to gout which ran in the Wharton blood.

He remained a bachelor ; Edward bought a commission ; Francis passed through a creditable college course at Cambridge ; but could not decide upon a subsequent career. He was reckoned a good classic and a sound mathematician ; and what more did a man want in that day ? He had no ambition to stay at Cambridge, and did not take such a class, or such a position in the mathematical tripos as to encourage any hopes he might have held of gaining a position there. He had a studious turn, but would not enter the Church ; neither was he inclined to enter the navy, though Nelson's deeds had rendered the naval service at that time very attractive to the cadets of good families. He had declined to be a midshipman, and preferred a civilian life ; so he had been sent to school, and after that to the University, without any definite aim ; and chiefly because the old

Squire did not see what else to do with him. He was too much of a Wharton to think of manufacture or commerce for his son. Yet Francis was not lazy. When his elder brother Charles came to be the head of the family he had even less inclination to press anything upon his younger brother. So Francis went here and there for a year or two, seeing most of the prominent towns of England. He had been to Bath, was familiar with Cheltenham, had visited Brighton; and had kept always in a good circle. The Squire's disinclination to marry; Edward's connection with the army, which was not favourable to matrimony; caused Francis to be looked upon as the one by whom the Wharton estates would be handed down to posterity. At last he came to Gaythorne Hall; and found amongst his brother's neighbours a Miss Marston, of Fowrass Grange.

Fowrass Grange was a comfortable if small country house, with a property attached to it—the Grange Farm. Her father,

Mr. Marston, was an asthmatic, and had been compelled to reside in the south, taking up his abode at Hastings. He was a widower of literary tastes, and brought up his daughter to share them. When his death permitted of Miss Marston returning to Fowrass Grange, the neighbouring Squires, their wives and daughters, were rather afraid of the well-read young lady; who if not quite so wealthy as themselves, stood above them in culture. She was a tall, auburn-haired lady, of erect carriage, and a decided will of her own. It is needless to say that Squire Wharton made no approaches to her, or her hand. He was a perfectly courteous neighbour; no more. But when the college-bred Francis came to Gaythorne Hall, a very different state of affairs began. The attraction was obviously mutual: the Squire had no objection to Miss Marston as a sister-in-law; she was of age, with no one to consult. She was not rich enough to attract that contemptible social parasite the fortune-hunter; nor was

she a very promising object for his wiles. So it ended in Francis settling down at Fowrass Grange ; near enough to Gaythorne Hall for intimate association betwixt the brothers. Perhaps Charles always entertained a little feeling of fear towards his handsome, clever, and managing sister-in-law.

The Whartons were fair : and the dark auburn hair of Mrs. Wharton formed a contrast to her husband's locks. They were held to be a handsome couple ; and when a little boy came in 1808 he was considered a beautiful baby. Some years elapsed before a little girl was added to the family group. When the last arrival came on the scene, the little heir of the Whartons was a remarkably handsome boy, with hair and eyes the colour of a new-fallen chestnut. He was of a more intense shade of colour than hitherto belonged to the Whartons. A bright little fellow he was, too, full of curiosity and willingness to learn ; and a great favourite with his uncle the Squire.

‘ Why should I marry, with a little chap

like that for an heir?' he would say in his good-natured way. 'I don't believe if I married I should ever have half such a fellow of my own. The Whartons won't drop out of their position with you at the head of them, Jack.'

Soon after his marriage Mr. Francis found that the Marston property was in a very confused condition. There was a good deal of it, scattered about; but there were also several mortgages. Mr. Marston had left his affairs in the hands of his solicitor, and the solicitor had made work for himself out of it. It was determined to make a clean sweep of it; so all was sold except Fowrass Grange and the Grange Farm; and the balance remaining after the expenses, and mortgages, &c. were all paid, was invested in some new docks building in Liverpool.

'The investment won't pay for a year or two, but it will come in pleasantly when the boy will have to go to college,' was the remark made over and over again by Francis to his wife.

When the little girl came the Squire was greatly delighted. 'Now I can bear the expenses of this one,' he would say. 'This one is my care. Now for the old Rolleston dower. I think fifty pounds a year for a start will feed and clothe her. At present at least! How do the docks get on, Frank? Not much plunder yet, eh?' he would continue in his genial brotherly way.

The old housekeeper at Gaythorne Hall was even fonder of the children than her master; and many a mild reproof little Jack got from his mother for visits to her room, where a carnival, threatening a stomach-ache, was invariably provided for him. But one day the old body caught cold, and was soon in her grave. The Squire hated new faces, and was determined to make Mary Allonby, the parlour-maid, housekeeper. Mrs. Wharton was firmly opposed to this, urging that a more experienced person was desirable. But the Squire showed that beneath the greatest good-nature there may lie, hidden from

ordinary vision, a hard piece of stubbornness in the groundwork of the character. It was the only difference which ever cropped up in the relations betwixt the two brothers.

Mrs. Wharton retained her connections, and was always courteous and civil to the new housekeeper; but always preserved a distinct distantness of manner. Mrs. Allonby, as she now was termed, felt this, as she was intended to feel it; but gave no sign of her feelings. The little fellow missed the old housekeeper, as the new one treated him less liberally than her predecessor; who endured his mother's protests without the slightest intention of heeding them. But under the circumstances such a position could not be continued, so Mrs. Allonby practised economy towards him; which was more trying to herself even than the boy. The relations of the two households were unaffected by this attitude of Mrs. Wharton towards the new housekeeper; who simply kept out of the lady's way at her visits.

Then the Squire went the way of his fathers, to the regret of every one. 'No man's enemy, but his own!' was the universal remark.

Edward had now to leave the army, where he had served with distinction in the war of 1812 betwixt Great Britain and the United States. He had been in Canada some fourteen years, and, except his brother's, all the faces almost at Gaythorne Hall were new. He made little change in the domestic arrangements of the Hall; and was as fond as his brother before him of seeing the children and their parents. Mrs. Wharton and he soon became great friends; he was glad to find some one with wider sympathies and a more extended knowledge than obtained among country families in those days. She too was delighted to have a neighbour who knew something of the world outside the West Riding and its local interests. So the good feeling was mutual. Mr. and Mrs. Wharton made their visits more frequent even than before; while the nurse

was at Gaythorne Hall with the children every day that the weather would permit.

They were two sweet children ; the little girl being a paler, less intensely coloured, copy of her brother. Squire Edward was quite as inclined as his brother before him to prefer a claim to her, and to honour the clause in his father's and Miss Rolleston's marriage settlement. But a very curious accident had happened ; the document had disappeared. Old Squire Wharton had always kept his deeds, and all papers and parchments relating to his property in an old oak chest, of massive character, guarded by portentous locks. He was afraid of their being mislaid, or lost : but he evidently entertained little or no fear of fire. Had a fire ever occurred at the Hall, that chest must have been carried out bodily ; for he kept the key of one lock, and his solicitor the key of the other. It was a great affair at the Hall when this chest was opened. When Charles had deposited his will in it a year or two before his death,

every paper and every deed was there. But after his will had been taken out, it was found on reading it desirable to consult the marriage settlement of Miss Rolleston. But it was not forthcoming when looked for. Another search followed, but was equally barren of result. It could not easily have been mislaid: it was too bulky to drop out of sight very easily. Poor Mr. Wordsworth the solicitor was greatly puzzled about it.

‘Wherever can it be?’ he said. ‘Whatever can have happened to it? The vouchers of the shares, they are all right! It was no use to anybody. There is no dispute in the family; there is no motive for any one to take it. Miss Edith will lose nothing by her uncle’s death. The Captain can allow her what he likes. There is nobody else for the money. Wherever is the deed?’ he asked of himself again and again, and of all around him. ‘The new Squire will be so annoyed,’ he remarked. In vain Mr. Francis tried to soothe him.

‘Look here, Wordsworth!’ he would say. What is the use of bothering about it? The shares are there, safe and sure; what is the use of troubling yourself? Edward will do just the same without it as with it. He knows about the original settlement as well as I do; or you either. I would not worry if I were you!’

‘Very likely; you are not the family solicitor. I am responsible for the documents. A pretty story it would be at Barnsley if Jeffcock and Wordsworth cannot keep their clients’ deeds safe; whether they are at their homes, or at our office. I tell you I must find it.’

‘Very well; but how do you propose to do it?’

It was no use; whatever injury and detriment, through loss of reputation, to the firm of ‘Jeffcock and Wordsworth, solicitors,’ might be the result, the marriage settlement of Miss Rolleston refused to be discovered anywhere. When Squire Edward, for he dropped his military title when he was

made a Justice of the Peace, on taking the Wharton Estates, heard of the incident, he treated it with the utmost unconcern. He continued the allowance of fifty pounds a year, and wished to double it. So taken up was he with his little nephew and niece, that shrewd judges declared he would never marry. 'The late Squire looked on them as if they were his own, and the new Squire's the same,' was the local comment. The opinion was warranted by the facts: for handsome as he was, with his erect military bearing giving him a commanding look; highly cultured with the reputation of a brave and skilful soldier; a gallant man in every respect as ever took a lady's eye; the Squire remained unmarried. The single ladies of the neighbourhood took this as a personal affront; and there were a number of spinsters around Gaythorne Hall who thought, and not unreasonably, that they could play the part of its mistress well. Some declared their conviction that the reason was that the

Squire was too fond of his good-looking housekeeper : who certainly filled the position to perfection, and let all beneath her, at least, know that she was the housekeeper ; though it was never urged that she did so in any unkindly manner. Others were equally certain that the rejection of the married state was due to his sister-in-law. No one was so blamed as Mrs. Wharton : he wanted a wife like her : they had not mind enough : such and such like were the remarks made by the disappointed spinsters. But, whatever the reason, the fact remained.

Years rolled on and the prospect of Squire Wharton's taking unto himself a wife died away even in the bosoms of the most sanguine of the marriageable maidens of the district. Two widows had set their caps at him, and besieged his heart with much courage ; but without success. The citadel could neither be taken by assault, nor carried by time. Both retired baffled and chagrined at their failure. He remained a bachelor.

If he was without wife, he could scarcely be said to be without children; for his nephew and niece were almost as much his as their parents'.

'Jack takes like me, to the Rollestons,' the Squire would say; 'he has more inches than the old Whartons; and he is heavier about the shoulders. He is close upon six feet. He would make a fine Guardsman, Frank!'

'Yes, so he would,' replied the father, looking on the youth with fond paternal pride; 'but Jack has no warlike ambition.'

'He has a lot of the Marston in him too; look at the tinge of colour in his hair and eyes, it is deeper than the blonde of the Whartons. It's a pity he has no fancy for a uniform!'

'He is like his father; a peaceful warfare his will be. But there is the fighting blood in him all the same. He will make a mark of his own, Ned; if you will be good enough to live on, and not spoil the prospects by dying: and so thrusting him

away from his own career by making him Squire of Gaythorne Hall.'

'Why, but you would be that, Frank!'

'I don't think so. You will outlive me. I don't say anything about it, it would worry the wife so. But I know it.'

'Tush! I hope not. One of us must hang on if only for the lad's sake: if he would be spoiled by the Wharton estates.' Such was their brotherly affection.

And Miss Wharton, Edith, what of her? She still remained a paler copy of her brother. Erect, high-spirited, 'leonine, tawny-haired, amber-eyed, full-throated, skin like a blanched almond; calm, high-tempered,' she was a 'positive blonde' after Oliver Wendell Holmes's own heart. She was a lighter shade of auburn than her brother. There was, too, much suppressed energy in her. Calm ordinarily, those eyes, 'shot through with golden light, dipped in yellow sunbeams,' could 'light up like lambent flame' when the feelings were roused by the tale of wrong or oppression.

‘He’ll have his work cut out that marries that girl, Frank,’ her uncle would remark.

‘She will not need the canal shares to get her off. But it may be well to keep my grip on them until we see what the fortunate fellow is like. She will please herself on that point, however willing to yield ordinarily.’

CHAPTER III.

THE SQUIRE'S HEIR.

SUCH then were the Whartons of the rising generation. A handsome pair they were too, as was universally admitted. Their father watched them with an interest intensified by the conviction that he would not be with them long. He began to look haggard, wasted, and having lived to see his boy of age, passed quietly away. His brother felt the wrench keenly. At Fowrass Grange the blow was received with an outward calm which told of inward sorrow. Mrs. Wharton was devoted to her husband, whom she worshipped. He was her idol, her embodiment of wisdom and goodness; for under his quiet exterior there lay qualities which perhaps were evident to her

alone, and at which his brother even only guessed. He would say—

‘Frank was a fine fellow, but he never made any figure; hadn’t enough of go in him. Would have made a capital member of Parliament. Could have thrown a lot of light on some of these questions that are causing so much commotion. But he was not likely to sit for a close borough; and never would have contested a large constituency. His talents were rather buried, I think,’ he would conclude; thinking vaguely of those whose lives were utilized but to the half of their full capacities. Possibly he had some rather sharp twinges about his own life.

Mrs. Wharton’s sorrow was dry-eyed for the husband she loved so well. She seemed to devote herself more completely now to her daughter, to whom she was an elder sister as well as a mother. All her energies were bent on the completion of her daughter’s education, which had been conducted by her father and herself. The

little maid had always been quick to learn, and had a retentive memory. Consequently, while her brother was away at school and college, she was the object of her parents' care, and her mind expanded naturally; and was neither dwarfed nor distorted by the boarding-school education of that day. She was a companion for her brother in his holiday rambles, and kept up with him in his studies very fairly. She had a smattering of Latin, and some mathematics, but her French was good. Mr. Francis Wharton had been very fond of the French language, so that the Squire (who was not given to study, but had picked up a colloquial French among the French colonists in Canada) often talked in that tongue; while the children were brought up to speak French and English alike, Mrs. Wharton being much exercised to correct the errors acquired by the Squire's example. In conversation with her daughter, in the study of history, in which French literature was extensively employed, and in other matters,

Mrs. Wharton found relief from her inward thoughts. But it was clear that she would ere long follow her husband. Edith's mind was constantly exercised about her mother's health, and in study each found diversion from the thoughts which at other times engrossed them.

When John was at home all seemed lively by comparison. He was a keen student, who, when he had completed a long spell of reading, would start, stick in hand, and go for a stroll over the Gog Magog Hills, or even as far as the heath of Newmarket. He was, in fact, a studious man by habit, and was believed to be one of the most promising men at his father's old college, King's, at Cambridge. It was evident that he was a worker by choice ; that it required no strain to keep him well in the collar with the traces tight. He took a better position in his final examinations than his father did ; and might have claimed from his college some recognition of his position, but he had no wish to settle in Cambridge.

He evidently inherited his father's tendencies to wander about, or perhaps in each case there was a return to the ways of our old nomadic ancestors ; and he was fond of mounting a knapsack and, stick in hand, setting off to see some place, some historic site, some fine scenery, or some industry which attracted his attention. One matter especially attracted his thoughts and enlisted his enthusiasm, and that was the progress of reform : the subject then convulsing the whole nation. As a student he had taken an active part in the politics of the day, and was frequently a speaker in the debates which went on in Cambridge. His sympathies were with the party of reform, and he was a Whig. Consequently after his college career was over he made himself familiar with different districts of England.

The rejection of the proposed bill of reform brought forward by Earl Grey, by the House of Lords in 1831, had been followed by a wild outburst of violence. The riotous

mobs of different towns retaliated on their enemies. Some of the prominent peers were assaulted and put in peril of their lives. Not only that, but their castles were fired or sacked. The Duke of Newcastle had to endure both, and his seat, Nottingham Castle, was burned to the ground. Belvoir Castle, the Duke of Rutland's, was attacked. Bristol plunged into riots such as have scarcely been witnessed in this country, when its recorder went there, who had been a strenuous opponent of the bill. Bread-riots were not unknown there ; but in this burst of fury the Mansion House, the Bishop's palace, the Custom House, warehouses and private dwellings, went up in flames, while the 14th Light Dragoons charged the masses. The mob at Derby broke open the gaol. All was fury. The opponents of reform grew alarmed. Amidst all too there was the incubus, the burden of the Corn Laws goading the poor to madness. The opponents of reform were *par excellence* the large landed proprietors, the

bulk of the peers who rejected the Reform Bill after it had passed the House of Commons.

‘Still their spells they mutter in the storm,
Retarding long the march of slow reform.’

Their opposition to the will of the people was producing the effects that might have been anticipated. Violence was afoot. The people and the landowners were locked in deadly strife.

‘While tower and temple at their bidding burn,
And the land reels and rocks from side to side,
A sailless wreck, with none to save or guide ;
A sailless wreck, with multitudes to do
Deeds more accursed than pirates’ deck ere saw ;
A helmless wreck, a famine-frantic crew,
All rage and hunger, hand and voice and maw ;
And in that rolling wreck, no food, no hope, no law.’

Such was the condition of the country. No wonder a thoughtful man like John Wharton was occupied with the events around him.

And how did this terrible deadlock end ? It forms an epoch in our history. Once more the bill passed the Commons ; the

Lords successfully opposed it ; the Whig ministry resigned ; the Duke of Wellington tried to form a Tory ministry, but failed. The Whigs went to the King, and at last wrung from him a promise to create as many new peers as would cast the balance of the House of Lords in favour of the bill. Lord Brougham asked the King to put his consent in writing. The King complied ; and the House of Lords sullenly bowed their stubborn heads, and passed the bill. The contest between the coronetted peers and the people was decided. The people had won ; but at what price ? The verses above tell. And the multitude had learned the dangerous secret,—the value of violence. This gave a stamp to the times which seem almost incomprehensible to us at the present day ; removed though we are from them by but half a century.

Leaving his mother and sister safe under the protection of his uncle, and amidst a rural population endeared to the family for their kindness and goodness in times past,

as well as present, John Wharton took his staff in hand and went out over the land—to see what he did see. And what he saw was not comforting. The country still seethed in disquiet; and demoralized by the old poor-law, the lower section of the wage classes was in a state disturbing to think of still. He returned much perturbed and decidedly of the opinion of Ebenezer Elliot, the poet,—the author of the ‘Corn Law Rhymes.’ He often repeated the lines—

‘To live in vain ! to live in pain !
To toil in hopeless sadness !
Is this the doom of God-like man,
O God of Love and Gladness ?’

The passing of the Reform Bill in 1832 had done much to allay the social hurricane. The new men of the House of Commons were far more the representatives of the people than the members of the ‘rotten boroughs’ could pretend to be. The middle classes were represented : and hope animated the lower classes that their turn would follow. The Whig ministry brought with

the reformed parliament a new increment of power, and set to work with a will to put the nation in order.

The lull gave him an opportunity of going over to the Continent, where he wandered first through Belgium and then through Normandy. First he went to Antwerp; and while he gazed with a student's interest upon the grand records of the great industrial epoch, when the wool of England went to the looms of Flanders, he carefully studied the people. Then leaving the wooden sabots as winter drew on, he skated over the canals of Holland, noting, observing, and reflecting. Then as spring approached he made a walking tour through Normandy. Here he was recalled by a letter from his sister, saying that his mother was not so well; the winter had tried her, and her strength was failing, and her cough more troublesome.

When John Wharton returned from this tour of observation his opinions were distinctly formed. It is needless to say they

differed widely from those entertained by his uncle. The latter was one of the land-owning party in every sense of the word. He did his duty to his tenants ; and he also knew what was due to the landlord. He thought the Corn Laws a part of the wisest devices ever ordained by heaven for the benefit of man. His nephew, though himself a landowner to a limited extent, did not share the views of his uncle. They differed, and differed widely ; and did not agree to differ. The nephew, as a young man who felt keenly, could not be expected to rest satisfied with a chill neutral position on so burning a question. His temperament was ardent. It was a time of change and of active thought. The air was filled with reform. The mighty deeds of the reformed parliament were illustrating the wisdom of the Reform Bill. The people were eager for further reform ; believing it would bring with it further blessings. The position is not difficult to understand. John Wharton held with the masses. His uncle

held the reformed parliament to be a pack of busy-bodies, who could let nothing alone, but must be tinkering and mending everywhere, till they would improve the British Constitution off the face of the earth ; and leave nothing but mob-law : believing this, Squire Wharton was also not likely to be a passive spectator of what was going on around him. He was quite satisfied with what he saw, and what he had seen ; and his own opinions thereon. He could never understand his nephew's craving for wandering about to see things for himself.

‘It is just poor Frank's way over again. It did him no good, and it will do you no good. I've been abroad, I've not been a stay-at-home man. I've been far enough from the old country to see her in comparison with the rest of Europe. I saw how far she was in advance of the other countries when I was in Canada. I came back and found it so. But you,’ he would say, ‘you only go about, it seems to me, to unsettle your mind. You come back to join the people

who think that England of all countries in the world is in most need of doctoring. Yes, that Dick, Tom, and Harry can guide the helm of state a precious deal better than the Duke; the only man who was more than a match for Napoleon. If that is the only outcome of your travel, I think you would have been a great deal better at home.'

John had his own private opinion that Canada was scarcely the standpoint from which to view Europe, or the best country to contrast with England, but he did not say so; so he put off his uncle's last argument by replying—

'Your observations have not been confined to England, I am quite ready to admit; but you must see, uncle, what a difference the tax on corn has made with the people.'

'Tax on corn made on the people! What do you suppose the Canadian farmer thinks about it?' he would burst in hotly. 'Do you think he would not sell his corn to

England? has he no grievance as he calls it?’

‘Well, let him send it here, there are mouths that would be glad to eat it.’

‘Yes, and how would the farmer pay his rent, do you think, in that case? The people must share the burden of the land; and how can they do it better than by paying a fair price for corn? Thus they share the farmer’s burdens. Quite right they should too!’

‘But then they don’t see it in that light, uncle. Perhaps an empty stomach warps their judgment. They think the loaf a little too dear.’

‘Then let them work a little harder for it. What do I see, but a great lot of idle fellows who will never work an honest day’s work as long as they can get a living out of the rates. Plenty of them!’

John knew that this was a strong point in his uncle’s storehouse of argument, so he would reply after this fashion :

‘But will not the new act to do away with the old poor laws, and refuse relief to any man that can work, except in the workhouse, be a cure for the evil? and a terrible evil it is, no doubt.’

‘Another bit of patching and mending. I wonder what will be left of the constitution when this reforming Whig government has done its do. Every evil to be mended right away. I wonder, however, the old country got on so far. Out of the frying-pan into the fire! Patch, and mend, and reform!’

At this point the Squire’s arguments began to get rather mixed, whereupon he would conclude: ‘Always the way; has been, and will be; the young folks so much wiser than their elders.’

‘But did not Job find wisdom in the youngest of his counsellors?’

‘Job be hanged!’ was the irreverent answer. ‘I don’t remember who his counsellors were; but if the youngest was the wisest of them, I fancy they were a poor

set. They wouldn't do in these times, however they got on then.'

It would be clear that at this point the Squire was moving from the ground of argument to the morass of declamation; and his nephew would beat a retreat. His respect and affection for his uncle overruled his strong convictions to the point of retiring—when he found that he could not yield.

Such is a sample of the conversations which frequently occurred betwixt uncle and nephew; both hasty in temperament and decidedly self-willed. Neither seemed at all likely to convert the other. Every fibre of the ex-warrior vibrated in harmony with the policy of the rulers as against the ruled. His nephew, on the other hand, not only was free from prejudices in favour of what had been, but he recognized the energy of the reformed parliament; both in what had been achieved, and what was proposed to be done, with every prospect of accomplishment. Despite

these collisions the relations of the Squire and his brother's family were as cordial as ever.

Mrs. Wharton's cough was growing worse, and at times she was seized with attacks of difficulty of breathing; and then some dropsy showed itself. It was clear to all that her time upon earth was limited, and very limited. John gave up his travels and settled down at home, where he made an assiduous nurse. Tenderly, carefully, kindly, considerately the brother and sister tended their failing mother. She in turn looked the position calmly in the face; she knew death was coming. But as life was closing in upon her, the prospect of rejoining her beloved husband was enlarging, and brightening as the time drew near when they should meet again. If she regretted the fact that she was leaving earth rapidly behind her, it was solely on account of her children. But, she reflected, they can do without me better than many children can their only parent. The lessons I have

taught them are like the seed that fell upon good ground. Their characters are formed; their principles good; and their faith sound. She sighed sometimes when the thought flashed upon her that she would have liked to have seen whom they would marry. The mother's heart in her yearned after their future happiness. It would be well with them, she felt assured; and then anxieties would thrust themselves upon her. When feeling fairly well she was pretty hopeful; when not so well, then the dark troop of imaginings would hover around her. When feeling decidedly ill the horizon of the future was very dark. But in these varying moods, even at the worst, she felt that her training had been the wisest she could have given them; and that it, added to their native disposition, would enable them to outride any storm that was likely to happen. The waves of sin would never engulf them, she felt; she hoped; she prayed. Patient and long-suffering too she was. 'How long, O Lord?'

was often in her heart, if rarely on her lips. But the disease steadily progressed, and she no longer could sit by the fire, but was confined to bed; here her children nursed her more attentively than ever. Beyond the daily walk each took from a strictly hygienic point of view, neither son nor daughter was ever seen, even at church. This walk, except when something very pressing took them elsewhere, was invariably up to the Hall, to tell Uncle Edward how his sister-in-law fared. Sometimes he had come to see the invalid; but he took into his head his visits distressed her, reminded her of the past, and so agitated her. His natural delicacy of feeling prompted him accordingly to stay away. He was right as to the fact, but in error in his interpretation. His visits did agitate the invalid, did remind her of the past; but she did not think of the past to regret the present; she thought of the past in connection with the future. His visits recalled to her the time when her

husband was with her upon earth. The thoughts they raised within her were of their being together once more in heaven.

At last the long-looked-for end came, late in the autumn of 1834 ; and the loving wife was reunited to her husband in the spirit : while all that was mortal of her was laid beside his remains in Brigstone church-yard, in the family burying-ground of the Whartons. It was a large gathering at the funeral, for the old-fashioned ‘ bidding ’ of the Whartons extended over the wide-spread parish ; and all honoured it, and the deceased lady by attending to it. It was the last act of respect they could pay the dead : and the rough, homely north-country folk have deep buried in them sentiment which they only manifest on special occasions, of which a funeral is the chief. She had not bought their respect by gifts, for her charity was limited by her means, but by her walk in life. Every one pointed to Mrs. Wharton as an example to be followed in the manner in which she had

brought up her children, and especially her daughter.

‘The finest, bonniest girl far and wide,’ they said in Yorkshire phraseology, in which ‘bonny’ means rather mentally attractive; whereas the Scotch ‘bonnie’ applies rather to good looks. Looked at indeed from either point of view, Edith Wharton was in fact ‘bonny.’ Grave, sad, thoughtful, bearing on her features the evidence of her patient vigils,—her long, long watching, in her mourning dress of crape she looked statuesque and even imposing. The rude crowd looked at the brother and sister with feelings of admiration, closely linked with profound respect; which found ready expression as it broke away from the churchyard to the liberal tea at the Brigstone Inns, the immemorial custom of the place. John and Edith Wharton went home to realize fully and distinctly that their mother could return to them no more. Keenly as they felt this, they inherited much of the Marston qualities, and occupied themselves;

realizing the fact that there is no evicting one set of thoughts effectually except by the steady introduction of other thoughts. So Edith went south for a visit to her father's cousin, Lady Barbara Saville, the daughter of the Earl of Horncastle, who had married a Rolleston. The Lady Barbara lived at Great Stanmore, in Middlesex.

It was a long journey; and when she arrived at her destination, Miss Wharton looked indeed like the motherless girl she was,—greatly in need of some one to look after her. Compared with Brigstone, Stanmore was a semi-tropical climate, though its slopes are comparatively high; and along the footpaths for which the meadow lands and pastures of Middlesex and Surrey are famous, the girl regained her wonted vigour, and the hue of health; albeit in a winter sun. Every one at Stanmore knew the Lady Barbara, and doffed their hat or dropped their curtsy, from the landlord of the Crown to the urchins who slid on the village pond in front of Thirlmere

Lodge ; when there was any ice permitting of that amusement.

John found some occupation at home. When the Grange Farm was let on lease the brothers decided it would be well to make the lease expire shortly after Edith came of age, so that John might act as he pleased ; for Francis knew he would never live to see the lease out. Consequently the tenant of the Grange Farm would leave the ensuing spring, and John consulted his uncle as to what should be done.

‘ I don’t like the idea of a Wharton being engaged in farming ; though, of course, it is somewhat different when the land is your own. It would be impossible to farm land from another. There is a good deal to be said, Jack, for your taking the land into your own hand. It would keep you near me : and though, my lad, we do see some things differently, I would not like to see less of you. And of course Edith will go with you, till she joins a husband ; and that would please me. Perhaps, too, if you shared the

lot of the landowners a little more it would do your views no harm. Old Holroyd was a good tenant, had saved money; you were never in any anxiety about your rent. But you must have a manager, Jack; I couldn't have my nephew and heir going to markets to sell corn, or buy cattle; or going round his stock with a cattle-jobber, or a butcher. That would not do.'

This difficulty in a managing man was solved by John Wharton mentioning to a friend what his design was; and how he felt his trouble about a man.

'Man!' he exclaimed; 'I know the very fellow for you. He had a small farm of his own, copyhold; he had to put a bit of a mortgage on to pay his brothers and sisters out, when his father died. Then the owners were a racketing set, and brother after brother died, at short intervals—those fast Lacklands you may have heard of—and the fines at the death of the lord counted up, till he decided to sell the place; as he would have to mortgage it up to the hilt other-

wise. So he sold it, and after all was paid he had a small balance left ; not enough to make a fresh start : but, as he says, it will be a nest-egg for his savings till he can start again. Luke Ellwood's his name. A steady, decent fellow, wife to match ; only one child. She is a good manager. Luke would like to make a beginning as a wage-servant somewhere where he was not known. He is the very man for you.'

So negotiations were set on foot which ended in Luke and his wife and child bringing their furniture with them, and settling down at the Grange Farmhouse. Luke soon found he had got a master to his mind ; and as for John Wharton, he was not long in discovering that his foreman was all he was represented to be ; and could discharge for him most efficiently those portions of his duties as a farmer, which the old Squire regarded as beneath the dignity of a Wharton.

CHAPTER IV.

FOWRASS GRANGE.

So John Wharton settled down as a gentleman farmer; and found in his new position much to interest, as well as to occupy him. He was brought into closer contact with national and local interests than he had hitherto been. To receive the rent punctually from a first-rate tenant leaves only a lukewarm interest in agriculture. Old Holroyd was a shrewd, calculating farmer, who had early in his lease seen that the position of the Grange Farm and its altitude was not favourable to the growing of wheat; or, indeed, to tillage of any kind.

‘Keep th’ land th’ green side upmost,’ was his maxim. ‘We can’t grow corn to a profit up here. But th’ limestone makes

it grand butter land ; nothing can touch limestone for butter. And th' lime makes bone. Good for th' young stock. Grass-farm the Grange ; them's my views. Good markets for butter close at hand ; and handy for th' butcher too. But it all lies i' th' judgment i' th' matter of stock ;' he would continue, with a twinkle in his keen blue eye, and a half-smile passing over his weather-beaten face. 'Anybody can grow corn where th' land and th' climate are right, wi' th' Corn Laws at their back. But all the corn laws i' th' world won't make th' Grange Farm a corn farm ; not as I can see.'

And the old man proved the practical wisdom of his view by prospering, as a waxing balance at his banker's told. So when Luke Ellwood came to the farm, Old Holroyd, who had gone into Brigstone, retired ('to live a gentleman,' as is the north-country term for a life not entailing work of any kind), would not unfrequently walk over to see the old place, with which so many memories were linked.

‘He’s got a good head on ’im, that manager o’ th’ master’s. I wonder how he comes to be takin’ wage? The master won’t do far wrong by takin’ the place into his own han’ wi’ him there; if he’ll only let him have his head. But the Whartons like their own way; and the Marston cross has not lessened that bit of ’em. But I’ll try a word or two with th’ master the first chance I get.’

It was not long before the opportunity came for the old man expounding his views. ‘I’ve done well by th’ place, an’ I could like to see you do well too, sir. There’s them as would laugh if you didn’t succeed; an’ I would not like to see them pleased;’ was his conclusion.

‘I suppose I am rather self-willed, Holroyd; but I hope I am open to conviction. You made the place pay, you say.’

‘Aye, I did. It paid me; an’ it will pay you, wi’ the man you’ve got.’

‘Then you think Ellwood’s the right man?’

‘ You’re i’ luck wi’ him at any rate. An’ if you’ll only bear i’ mind the natur’ o’ th’ farm, and what it’s fit for, you’ll do right enough.’

John Wharton pondered over the matter frequently, and asked Luke what he thought.

‘ I’m o’ th’ ould man’s opinion, sir. This place is a grass farm, and nothing else. He’s a clivver ould chap, kept his eyes open ; and then he was well backed up wi’ his women-folk. You can do no good wi’ young stock and butter if the women won’t help i’ earnest. A good milk-stock all the year round : some of the cows to calve i’ the spring, and some at the back-end, when butter is dear ; and a few young stock to fat i’ th’ summer. I agree wi’ old Mr. Holroyd. That’s the way he did it : and that is the way for you, sir, if I may say so.’

This was a long speech for Luke, but he wanted ‘to have his say out’ when the chance came ; just like old John Holroyd, who could not screw himself up to talk to

‘th’ young Squire,’ as he was familiarly termed in the neighbourhood, while still a tenant of his.

‘Well, how do you propose to carry it out, Luke?’

‘I’ve been turning it over i’ my mind, sir. I and the man can look after the stock, indoor and out; and the wife will see to the milk and butter, if she had a strong lass to help her. If you would just walk over the pastures now and again and see th’ stock are all right, sir?’

‘Well, my part of the farming is not going to be very heavy, so far as I can see, Luke.’

‘I hope not, sir. But you’ll have to be there pretty constant, for I can’t look after the stock i’ the fold and be away both; leastwise mostly.’ It was quite evident Luke was prepared to do his part; but he wished a clear understanding on the matter with his master.

John Wharton saw this, and felt his confidence in Luke all the stronger for taking up this position.

‘I cannot expect the plan to succeed if I set the example of shirking myself, Luke. It is my affair, and I must look after it. You will have to teach me a good many things, I suspect. I used to think it was very nice of old Holroyd to keep the place, as he calls it, “the green side up,” when I went out with my gun; but I cannot say I ever gave my mind to his reasons for avoiding the plough. I knew he was a capital tenant; that was all. We bought a good deal of his stock at the sale, didn’t we, Luke?’

‘Yes; a fairish lot, I’m glad to say; and I wish we’d had more. We’ll have to get some more soon, sir.’

‘Well, I thought it well to be neighbourly. John had always been a good neighbour, as well as a tenant, and been very obliging. I could not do less. And it seems in doing a neighbourly turn I have profited myself. When do you propose to buy some more stock?’

‘There’s a spring fair at Huddersfield

next week. I thought o' seeing if I could find anything to my mind thear; if you could let me have th' money, sir. My little bit's locked up.'

'Bless me, certainly; I never thought about that. I will give you so much, and you must keep an account.'

'I'll keep the accounts, sir, I'se warrant you. It wasn't the want of keeping accounts that sent Annas and me away fra' th' old place. But o' th' keepin' th' accounts i' th' warld wouldn't keep the Lacklands fra' drinking; and the fines ruined us.'

'I am aware of all that, Luke; though of course I did not like to say anything. I have every confidence in you; I can assure you. I have been thinking though, that it is hardly fair of you to get no more for doing your work thoroughly than if you only got through it anyhow. If things do well this year, I am going to propose to you to take a per centage on the profits, if they reach a certain figure. What do you say?'

‘Well, I’d like to think it over, sir. I couldn’t enter into such a bargain, wi’out on th’ other hand taking a share i’ th’ losses. I couldn’t do th’ one, and not t’other. I’d like to talk it over wi’ th’ wife, sir. Women like to be consulted i’ these matters when they are concerned : as you’ll find when you’re married, sir. Excuse my saying so.’

‘That’s your opinion is it, Luke ? I am a bachelor, and therefore can have nothing to say. It is evident you respect your wife’s opinion, Luke. You can tell me what your conclusion is after you have talked it over together.’

Matrimonial relations were evidently subjects which had not particularly interested John Wharton, so far at least ; but Luke’s remark was not forgotten.

‘I shall be very glad if this plan will work. Of course I should like the scheme to succeed. As old Holroyd says, there are those who no doubt would enjoy a laugh at my expense if it didn’t ; and I cannot say

the Whartons, or the Marstons either, for that matter, have any liking for being laughed at. We are too thin-skinned for that. I am so thankful too that such a plan would do away with any questionings about the right to grow corn under the existing corn laws, and my private views upon the subject. I certainly should not like to have to grow corn; and it is a mercy that I can do without doing so.'

After he had matured his plans, he was telling his uncle about what he had decided upon.

'I think you are decidedly prudent in following old Holroyd's example; and the scheme is a sound one. All depends upon Ellwood's judgment in buying the stock. Does old Holroyd seem to think he is equal to it?'

'He tells me so. He has been very good in giving us every information his experience can suggest; he gave Ellwood, what seems in the face of it, some practical advice the other day.'

‘What was that?’ asked the Squire, rather eagerly.

‘He said, never buy any stock from below you, from the lowlands; they never do so well when brought to a place higher up. Look to the moor-farmers for your stock. No matter if they are in poor condition; they will come out on a good pasture. Always buy from above, never from below; that was his advice.’

‘Shrewd old dog, Holroyd. He never feathered his nest so well out of the Grange Farm without using his wits. And he left it in capital condition too. Rather too much grass, I fancy.’

‘The last season has been favourable to tillage I admit, and the arable land did well; but, I think, as a general rule, old John was right. I am glad the farm is in grass, as I am in no trouble between my convictions and my interests.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, I am glad I shall not grow corn;

I could not do so with a clean conscience, holding the opinions I do.'

'I should fancy not. If you had a field of waving corn of your own, perhaps the corn laws would not look so abominable. I see this scheme will suit you capitally. My hopes that a little practical experience of farming would convert you, are dashed to the ground. Your interests and your opinions will not clash under these circumstances : ' continued the Squire ; nettled at an arrangement which did away with one argument upon which he had relied, with some confidence, for his nephew's conversion. His nephew thought it well to let this item of the conversation drop ; so instead of answering directly, he replied,

'It will give me a good deal to do in the way of seeing after the cattle in the pastures ; I must be out every day. I cannot play at farming, and merely see the men are at work ; as an arable farm would permit.'

'I suppose so. If the place was in Essex

you would ride about and see the men were after the plough, or sowing the seed, or pitching the corn-sheaves. You would realize the value of corn then! But, however, I am glad your time will be largely occupied. When you come to know a little more about the land and its burdens your eyes will be opened.'

The Squire was still unquiet; but was hopeful of his nephew's experience in connection with agriculture weaning him from the objectionable views which had taken possession of him.

'Have you heard from Edie lately?' he went on. 'I hope she will be coming back soon. I want to see her. She will be staying down there till some young fellow will be persuading her to share lots with him.'

'I don't think so, uncle. That idea has not struck me about Edie.'

'Very likely not; but it has me. Now look here, Jack! you and your sister are my care now that you are left. You can go

your own way; and will do it, despite anything I might say——’

‘Nay, uncle, that is scarcely fair. I am sure I shall always consult your wishes when possible.’

‘When possible, very likely; that is, when your own wishes harmonise with mine. But when your principles interfere, an uncle without offspring on an entailed estate does not count for much. Well, well! I shall let you do your own way. But about Edie, she is of age now. I suppose she will be your housekeeper—until, of course, she goes to keep some other young fellow’s house. Now I dare say your fine farming scheme will not be very lucrative at first: and I am not going to have Edie pinched, or short of money when starting housekeeping; so I am going to double the allowance I have made her hitherto.’

‘It is very handsome of you, I am sure.’

‘But remember she has not to take it to help in the housekeeping expenses. That is not my design. I want her to have

what money she may require for herself, without bothering you for anything. If the plan does not pay, you may not have much to spare. I don't want you to feel her a burden.'

'I don't think I should ever feel her that, uncle. Besides, she has something of her own from mother. And I have my dock shares. I think we can get along without my having to stint Edie at all.'

'I dare say you can, my boy; and I am very glad to hear of the dock shares paying well. Times have been good with me too. Farming has been profitable the last year or two; and the canal shares pay well. If those confounded railroads do not spoil the canal business. But you know, Jack, I am not going to hand over the canal shares. Your father and I agreed that I was to keep my grip on them until we, or rather your late mother and I, saw her choice. She is high-spirited; and high-spirited girls are apt to be headstrong. If I gave up the shares, they would be a

temptation to some fellows who are not desirable. As it is, I am partly master of the situation. He will have to satisfy me as well as her, you know.'

'That is a matter on which I cannot interfere, uncle. That you will act for the best I know well. I quite understand about increasing the yearly allowance to Edie; it is very kind and considerate of you, and I thank you, and I have no doubt Edie will too. I am sure if I was not very full of funds, she would do anything sooner than ask me for money. And I may not be successful, though I shall try hard. "It is not every one that can command success," you know, uncle.'

'I know; and I know the rest of the quotation—"But we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it." I dare say you will do that too. I am sure I wish you may; both for your sister's sake, and your own. You will write and tell her what I have said. I find writing letters harder work than it used to be.'

‘I will write to her at once ; and I dare say she will write to you directly, ere long.’

‘Mind you give her my best love, and kindest regards to Cousin Barbara. She used to be a kindly-hearted, gossiping soul ; I fancy she has not altered much. The girl will be full of all the gossip about the court. No harm in that now. Queen Adelaide has made the court fit for the little daughter of the Duke of Kent to live in, if she lives to come to the throne ; as I am sure I wish she may. You won’t forget.’

However stoutly John Wharton might adhere to his convictions, and in so far oppose his uncle, he never could be other than sensible of his uncle’s thorough good will and his generosity.

When Edith Wharton received the letter acquainting her with her uncle’s intentions, she told Lady Barbara ; and both admired very much his kind-heartedness and his generosity.

‘The money comes out of the old

Rolleston canal shares, does it not, Edith ?' her hostess asked. ' Was not the old settlement lost ?'

' So I have heard ; when Uncle Charles died it could not be found. But it was always held that it made little matter unless Uncle Edward married.'

' And very little then, my dear, from what I have understood of your uncle's character. It only makes this difference ; that instead of having the money in your own right, you have to await your uncle's discretion. You know, my dear, you will excuse my saying so, but I think you are quite as well without the money in hand.'

' Whatever do you mean, Lady Barbara ?' said Edith, flashing up. ' I cannot conceive your meaning.'

' Ah, there it shows, the compound of the Wharton and the Marston ! You are a fine, handsome girl ; but, my dear, you are hasty. I am sure you will admit that is not unfair criticism.'

' Yes, I am, I know it, and I do struggle

with it ; but I cannot always command myself as I would like. But what do you mean about it being well that I must await Uncle Edward's discretion about the money ?'

'Well, my dear, a handsome, impulsive girl like you, with money of your own, might attract admirers—well ! who would not press their attentions upon you while your uncle holds these shares.'

'And do you think I would be taken by a man in that way—a bird for the fowler ?' she replied. 'I have all the self-respect of the Whartons and the Marstons : to say nothing of my mother's training.'

She was evidently wounded deeply ; and yet the Lady Barbara meant what she said in the very kindest spirit. With her it was nothing more than the truism, that a handsome, well-bred girl, with money of her own, is the aim of the fortune-hunter.

'You feel too intensely for your own peace of mind, my dear, I fear, at times. But come, kiss me, Edith, I did not mean to vex you ;' went on the good-natured lady.

‘Your Uncle Edward’s kindness is all the same, despite my thoughtless remark. It is the sort of advice we older folks are constantly giving to girls. You know old people think they are so wise. I am over sixty, you know ; I am getting quite an old woman.’

‘It is very foolish of me, I know. I am so sorry. You are quite right. But girls sometimes are sensitive about such remarks—some girls more than others. I am sure I have never thought of marriage, though I know Stephen Oldfield has an eye to me. The little conceited creature !’

‘Then, my dear, if you have not thought about the matter, my remark was the more excusable. You will have to think about it, my dear. You see, if you don’t ; the gentlemen think about you evidently. Who is this Stephen Oldfield ?’

‘I wish I had not mentioned his name. He lives at Orton Hall, a few miles away, and pays court to Uncle Edward. John does not care much about him. He says he

is a cunning, artful, self-seeking, sleek-haired humbug.'

'My dear, that is very strong language to use about a neighbour. What makes John say so?'

'He does not like him. He says he is a Jacob—a smooth man. And John detests Jacobs. I can't like Mr. Oldfield; though he is always very kind and neighbourly.'

'I am afraid John has prejudices, my dear. We should always avoid prejudices above all things. You know, if we hold prejudices we may be very unfair to people whom we may come to like and respect, when we know more about them. We should always be open to conviction. I am sure Mr. Oldfield must have some good points about him, else your Uncle Edward would not approve of him, or associate with him.'

It was quite clear that Lady Barbara was fully impressed with the wisdom of elders, as was natural, when she herself was advancing in years.

‘Oh, he is an active magistrate, and a staunch true-blue Tory. He agrees with uncle against reform, and all other political questions. John says he ought to know better.’

‘But, my dear, I am afraid John is wrong in his extreme views. From what you tell me, I fear he is inclined to be a reformer—one of those persons who wish to overturn society; as I understand. I am like your uncle, I don’t like these views. I wish John would give them up. Tell him so, from me, when you get home.’

Edith thought her brother was not very likely to be influenced by the message, but she promised to deliver it; and as the old lady seemed to think she had accomplished a piece of far-sighted diplomacy which would have great results, she did not like to undeceive her complacent satisfaction. Next day she wrote a long letter to her uncle, in which she thanked him very prettily for his considerate generosity; telling him too, that in a few days more

she would be back again at Brigstone, well and strong.

Lady Barbara was very sorry to part with her handsome young relative, who had become a general favourite among the families at Stanmore and the neighbourhood; and made her promise not to be very long in repeating her visit.

‘I am getting an old woman, you know, I cannot expect to see you often. Come again as soon as you can. There is the horn of the coach. Wrap up and keep yourself warm.’

The coach pulled up at the Crown, and Miss Wharton took her place inside, while her travelling trunk was placed on the top. Then the coachman started his horses at a gallop at the hill on the road leading out to Watford, and Stanmore was quickly out of sight.

As she crossed the Midlands Miss Wharton’s thoughts often reverted to her journey of a few months before. Then all was preparing for winter; now the winter was over and all were looking for spring. When she

travelled the road before she was under the cloud of a great grief, worn out with long watching; now she was in vigorous health and buoyant with hope, full of her brother's schemes. Sometimes she felt as if she was wanting in respect to her mother's memory to forget the past; but she recognized it would neither be right nor proper to brood over it. Her elastic temperament rebounded from the depression of the past—and she felt it was not wrong, not failing in loyalty to her mother's memory, to look forward to the future.

When she arrived at Sheffield the Squire's carriage was there to meet her, and her brother with it of course. When they had reached a private room, her brother took her in his arms and kissed her; while a long lingering look told him she was fully restored to health.

‘You have indeed made good use of your visit, Edie. I must write and thank Lady Barbara for the care she has taken of you; that is the least I can do.’

‘I have a message for you from her ; it will keep. I will tell you it when you get home. Don’t bother about it now !’

He did not bother : his utter want of curiosity as to its nature would have sadly discomposed the good lady had she seen him. It did not suggest that her message would have any very magical effect in altering his views, when he did hear it.

‘How is Uncle Edward ?’ she went on. ‘And the Pryors ; are they well ?’

‘Uncle has had a little gout, which has made him slightly irascible, otherwise he is very well. The Pryors too are well ; and, like him, are glad to hear of your return.’

Such and such-like was the staple of their conversation, as might be expected when one member of a family had been away in the olden time. Now it would be something of this kind. ‘How late you are ! What was it ?’ ‘Oh, we had to wait at Market Harboro’ for some horse-boxes to be put on, and then at Derby for the Bristol train.’ ‘What a nuisance ! Are your traps

all safe? Have you got an evening paper? This is the newspaper train. Oh, you've got the "Globe." All right! Your uncle has had the fidgets: his doctor calls it the gout. It makes him deucedly nasty I know. How was the old girl when you left her?' From which it would appear, that though modern means of travelling are much more expeditious and agreeable than a stage coach; the conversation of the present is not so conspicuously superior to the talk of a by-past generation.

On their arrival at Fowrass Grange their conversation turned upon the new scheme, and all that each intended.

'I am going to take a share in the interest, Jack. I am going with you when it is fine to see the cattle in the pastures. And I want to learn to make butter. I wonder if Mrs. Ellwood will be pleasant, and let me go in to the dairy?'

'I don't know about Mrs. Ellwood, and her private views; but I do know your Uncle Edward will object to it. You are

a Wharton, you know. He found my turning farmer rather a large pill to swallow ; it took several gulps to get it down. But I fancy he will never manage such a bolus as you turning dairymaid, and making butter.'

'Dear Uncle Edward, he is so good. But he is so impressed with what belongs to the Whartons. I can't do it against his knowledge ; however shall I manage it?'

'Female diplomacy will do it, Edie, I'll be bound ; if it can be done at all.' And somehow or other the young lady did contrive to overcome her uncle's objection,—to the extent of making the butter required for her brother and herself ; with no little pride in her success. Still to have sent her uncle a pat would not have been a politic step.

CHAPTER V.

THE REFORM MILL GRINDS.

THE most frequent visitor at Fowrass Grange was the Rev. Henry Pryor, rector of Brigstone. His visits were no less frequent than welcome. He was a "parish priest" indeed, as his flock called him, for he knew his parishioners.

There was a sprinkling of dissent in Brigstone, but it was not enough to leaven the parish ; and there was no chapel except a miniature one on the edge of the Satanstoe collieries. At every house the rector was welcome, and he had been an especial friend of Mrs. Wharton's in her last illness. A casual observer would note that he seemed naturally fitted for his calling, and his ordination vow was not a mere

matter of form. He was an Oxford man, and had naturally a good deal of the spirit of the Tractarian movement which sprang up after he was at Queen's College. This protest against the spiritual deadness of the Church of England had attracted the attention of earnest men throughout the land, who wished to be something more than the mere civil servants of the State, with certain duties to discharge in return for their stipends. This was not the view of Mr. Pryor. He had much of the enthusiasm of the apostolic age, and laboured amongst his people as one who should give an account of his stewardship. During Mrs. Wharton's illness he constantly visited her, read to her, and comforted her. But he made no exception to his rule in thus ministering to the dying lady at Fowrass Grange; the meanest and poorest of his parishioners shared with her his ministrations. When then the Tractarian movement sprang up, and the glowing fire of enthusiasm swept through the ranks of

the Anglican party ; and church building, church extension, and parish visitation were the outward form of the inward feeling ; Mr. Pryor rejoiced. Especially he approved of its design to charm, to win proselytes ; its avoidance of all aggression. It came not to plunge a parish into discord ; but to unite it in the bonds of peace, as well as of earnestness.

In John Wharton the rector found a parishioner with whom he could hold converse as a scholar. Thus there was a double tie betwixt him and the inmates of Fowrass Grange. When Mrs. Wharton died, the memory of his kindness to her lived in the breasts of her children. It was not merely the force of habit which caused him to continue his visits to Fowrass Grange. A strong friendship had sprung up betwixt him and John Wharton. He was glad to have a cultured, college-bred man for a parishioner ; both personally and as the spiritual head of the parish. The rector

thought his parishioner could be made useful, and ought to be utilized.

‘I want you very much to do something for me, Wharton,’ he said one day.

‘What is it, Mr. Pryor? I will oblige you if I can; you know that.’

‘Yes; but this is a great matter. I want you to think it over before deciding.’

‘Whatever can it be? You seem so serious!’

‘I am very serious indeed. I want you to be a guardian of the poor under this new poor law. I cannot make a slight matter of it.’

‘What amount of duty will it entail? You know I have taken the Grange Farm into my own hands. This will make considerable demands upon my time. I must know if I can afford the time to do the duties properly, before I can entertain the proposition.’

‘The board-day will be once a fortnight, and be held at Wybrow, where the work-house is to be for our little union. I

propose to be one guardian, though it is a secular matter ; and I think you are the most suitable person for the other representative of the parish. We will have to meet the magistrates, who are ex-officio members. Your uncle is one, and Mr. Oldfield is another, and Canon Wordsworth, and one or two more. There will be a good deal to do at first till we get the thing into working order ; and, if possible, men of position and education must be secured, in order to act firmly with the rough fellows who fastened themselves on the rates under the old law,—the “chargeable labourers” as they are called.’

‘Those fellows that Uncle Edward inveighs so terribly against.’

‘The same. They will form a great difficulty ; especially as the premises we have secured as a workhouse will require a lot of alterations before being fit to be occupied ; and you see we will not be able to offer them “the house,” the “Whig Bastille” as they call it, until it is ready.’

‘They must be firmly dealt with, else we will be beset with difficulties. I will think it over; and it may be well to sound Uncle Edward on the matter.’

‘That will be a proper step. How soon do you think you can give me an answer? There is to be a meeting of the rate-payers at the latter part of next week; will you be able to let me know your decision by then? I should much like to have you and myself proposed at the meeting.’

‘I will give the subject my best attention. It is a grave matter to decide upon; as, if I put my hand to the plough, I cannot very well withdraw it.’

The subject engaged John Wharton’s thoughts very gravely. In the discussions he had heard on the matter he had taken no more than a casual interest. Not having any formed views as to where he should reside or what he should do, he had not given his attention much to the subject. But now, as Mr. Pryor presented it to him, its full importance forced itself upon him.

He was at heart a reformer. When then an opportunity came to take a practical share in the work of reform, he could not well stand aloof. That was one side of the question. Then came in the personal element. If Mr. Pryor seriously wished him to assume the duties of guardian, he could scarcely refuse him. The post was not one to be coveted; it involved a good deal of labour, and a certain amount of odium. The 'chargeable labourers' were like leeches who had once tasted blood, they kept on sucking. Having once established themselves on the rates, there was no prospect of readily driving them off. There was no great amount of these aggressive paupers in Brigstone, the Whartons had prevented that evil; but in the other parishes, which formed the rest of the union, the evil was considerable.

In order to enable the reader to understand the proposed change, which has been a matter of great national importance, a brief historical summary is essential. The

duty of the overseer of the poor in each parish was to find work for the unemployed ; or, if that could not be done, to find them in food. This had been established by acts dating from the time of Elizabeth. Sturdy vagabonds, now called vagrants, were a greater nuisance then than they are now. Consequently stern measures were adopted to repress them. Each parish kept its inmates to itself, as far as possible ; and wandering was made decidedly unpleasant. But if a parish could not find work for its poor, they could not be allowed to die of hunger. Starvation could not be permitted. Consequently ‘workhouses’ were instituted, where the overseers of the parish could ‘take order for setting the poor to work.’

By a bloody code of laws crime was repressed according to the light of that day. In 1796 the device was hit upon of eking out the wages of the poor from the parochial rate, otherwise called ‘the allowance system.’ It was a benevolent

design ; but its outcomes merely furnished one more illustration that a certain unsavoury place is paved with good intentions. This 'partial payment of wages out of the poor rates' became in time an intolerable nuisance. Idle fellows would not, and pleaded they could not, find work ; and threw themselves on the rates. Thus subsidized, they poached, got up rows, and were the terror of all around them ; where they were strong in number, and the rate-payers weak or timid. In some places the farmers forced down wages in order that the working class might be aided by 'the allowance system,' when the other rate-payers of the parish were wealthy enough to offer temptation. In other parishes 'the chargeable labourers' became so numerous that farms were unlet ; men simply would not apply for them because the rates were so heavy. The device weighed so heavily on the land that even the Corn Laws could not secure tenants. A whole brood of pauperism had grown up over the land,

which constantly received recruits; but never furnished any free labourers, or 'independent labourers,' as those were termed who kept themselves off the rates. 'Once a pauper always a pauper,' was the saying. The parish rate for the poor was the equivalent of the pension-list of the aristocracy. The evil became so great that some leading reformers despaired of remedying it in any other way than by the entire abolition of the poor rates; and so leaving starvation and private charity face to face with each other. St. Paul's maxim, 'If ye will not work, neither shall ye eat,' was, however, scarcely compatible with the instincts of the nineteenth century. A commission appointed to inquire into the matter decided that the scheme was 'destructive to the industry, forethought, and honesty of the labourers, to the wealth and morality of the employers of labour and the owners of property, and to the mutual goodwill and happiness of all.' This sweeping condemnation was

endorsed by all classes of society except 'the chargeable labourers' themselves : who, however, not being represented in parliament, were legislated for. And for this legislation they were not thankful.

By the new act parishes were grouped into unions ; each union had its workhouse ; which really became in time an asylum for those incapable of working, rather than the house where work was found for the unemployed : retaining its old name when serving quite an opposite end. For the aged and infirm outside the workhouse, or those temporarily compelled to apply to the rates, a relieving-officer was appointed ; the old overseers of the poor only acting in emergencies. To work the scheme, the ratepayers of each parish elected so many guardians of the poor to represent them on the Board ; while the magistrates were *ex-officio* guardians by virtue of their position. To supervise all there was a Central Board in London. Contracts with medical men for the workhouses, and the ' districts,' as the

divisions of the Unions were called, to each of which a medical officer was appointed, had to be sanctioned by the central authority ; as were all other important matters.

Such central control limited the local powers, and acted as a wholesome restraint on local opinion in many ways. It was one of the greatest of the reforms ; and its effects have been admitted by all to have been most beneficial. Without it Pharaoh's seven lean kine would before long have eaten Pharaoh's seven fat kine ; and the fat kine saw what was coming.

One great difficulty in the old arrangement was 'settlements.' Vagabondism was sternly repressed by it ; and only handicraftsmen who had served a regular apprenticeship to their craft were allowed to travel in search of work according to the demand for labour, known as 'journeymen.' Unskilled labour had no encouragement given it to wander in search of employment. But men would and did wander ; or perhaps ran away from home for some social offence or

petty crime. When one of these wanderers became chargeable to the rates his 'settlement' was searched out, and he was returned to his proper parish. Great cost was involved in so returning a pauper, often with a wife and family, to his native 'parish;' and far greater sums were spent in lawsuits by the respective parishes. By the new scheme the pauper would be relieved on the spot, and the amount charged to his own parish. The machinery of this large comprehensive Act, involving all England and Wales, enabled such matters to be carried out equitably and peacefully.

Such then was the huge social transformation in which the Rev. Henry Pryor wished his neighbour and parishioner, John Wharton, to take a share. Educated men were essential to the working of this new machine; though others might serve as Guardians when once all was got thoroughly into working order. To 'the chargeable labourer' the whole thing was iniquitous class legislation; the Board of Guardians was unmiti-

gated tyranny ; and the workhouses were ‘Whig Bastilles.’ He saw clearly that ‘no out-door relief for the able-bodied,’ the soul of the new Poor Law, was the death-knell of idleness ; and he did not like it. However desirable for the rest of society, it was a change of which he could not be expected to approve. But the rest of society being not only the majority, but holding the purse-strings, the pauper had to submit. There was no longer ‘parish pay’ except at the discretion of the Board of Guardians. This did not meet his views at all. Idle fellows who spent their earnings in drink as quickly as possible in order to qualify for ‘parish pay ;’ lawless fellows who poached and often stole ; idle dissolute women who would do anything but work ; saw with dismay that a change was at hand. However good for them other people might hold the prospect, it had no attractions for the class who were mainly to be benefitted by the new Act. The old plan suited them very

well, and they had no goodwill towards the new Poor Law.

In the half-century ending 1833 the population had increased 75 per cent., while the Poor Law levy had in the time increased 300 per cent. It was high time the fat kine were looking about them. Even the Duke of Wellington, staunch Tory and opponent of reform as he was, supported the measure in the House of Lords.

Thunderstorms clear the air; but in the mean time thunderstorms are decidedly unpleasant. Such was the thunderstorm to which Mr. Pryor invited John Wharton to give him his assistance as regards Brigstone, and the Union to which it belonged. John Wharton spoke to his uncle about his being a Guardian.

‘Capital!’ answered the old Squire; ‘nothing could possibly be better. You are just the sort of man for an elected Guardian to work with the magistrates. The farmers are too dense, they would never be put into motion; and there is a great deal to be done.

I am very glad Mr. Pryor thought of it. And another thing, nephew mine, when you come to mix with the poor officially as a Guardian it will cure you of some of your romantic notions. You will cool down into a good upholder of society in time. You will not be such a fiery reformer, you'll find.'

'Well, suppose I do,—though I am not so sanguine of my conversion,—you must admit that this piece of the reformed parliament's work is acceptable to you,' he replied rather mischievously; knowing the Squire's susceptibility to any insinuation of change in his views.

'Well, something had to be done; we could not go on as we were. The Whigs were in power, and of course must deal with the matter. I dare say we will find plenty of difficulties in carrying it out. It will be time to crow when we see how it works. I am glad you are going to bear a hand. The Wybrow Board of Guardians promises to be as good a team as any I can hear of. You

and the Rector will hobnob with the magistrates capitally.'

'I am heartily glad you approve of it, uncle. I was undecided what to do ; now I shall call and tell Mr. Pryor without delay that I am willing to serve.'

The Rector was delighted to hear his decision : and when the meeting of the ratepayers came off, the two were proposed and elected unanimously. Not only that, but the people of Brigstone were delighted that Mr. Wharton was going to take an interest in parish matters.

'Eh, but I'm fine an' glad that gentlefolks like th' parson and Mr. Wharton are going to tak' this job i' hand. I were so feared as it would break down i' th' working. We ratepayers won't be long i' seeing the last of our friend "the chargeable labourer," who'se bin a charge to us lang eneauf, to my mind. His back's th' best sight of 'im i' oor eyes ;' was the comment of one sturdy farmer. 'Mr. Wharton will stand by th' magistrates, I reckon ; but

there'll be some sharp work afore these "chargeable labourers" 'll be gotten rid of.'

Nor was the farmer far out in his forecast; there was some 'sharp work.'

The first meeting of the local Wittenagemot, otherwise the Wybrow Board of Guardians, was held in the rooms of the King's Head, the best hotel in the town; a roomy place, well adapted for the purpose. The magistracy mustered in strong force, and every one of the elected Guardians, the representatives of the ratepayers, was present. The senior magistrate present, Canon Wordsworth, a man of great energy and decision of character, was voted to the chair; and a very capable chairman he was too. After the vice-chairman had been elected, the Canon, as chairman, made a few brief but appropriate remarks. He commenced by pointing out what a vast measure of reform the new Poor Law was, and how necessary it had become to deal firmly with the waxing abuse of 'parish pay.' Had the old plan continued long, the burden of

pauperism would have become intolerable. 'We must act, gentlemen,' he insisted, 'with firmness and decision, as well as with discretion.' He was glad to see the direct representatives of the ratepayers joining hands with the magistrates in dealing with the immense subject. Concluding, 'Gentlemen, there is a very great deal to be done, and I think we had better start at once to do it than waste time in talking about it. What is the first business, Mr. Clerk?'

'The first matter, Mr. Chairman, is to deal with the applicants for out-door relief; some of whom are very noisy outside.'

The first applicant was a widow, who held up her hands stiffened by rheumatism as evidence that she could not maintain herself. It was decided that she was a fit subject for out-door relief, so her name was entered upon the relieving officer's list. Next came a cripple who did any odd job that he could find. His name went down. Then came in a burly ruffian, Will Dalton, a 'chargeable labourer' of old standing,

who was a noted poacher ; a bully who was dreaded by the public-houses, their keepers, and their frequenters ; a fellow who was a first-rate hedger and ditcher, thresher, and thatcher—when he pleased : but this last was very seldom. He had long decided that he would have a tussle with the new Board. Most of them knew him well. The magistrates knew him for a bold, desperate poacher, greatly detested by their game-keepers ; the farming element knew him for a man who would steal a stake whenever he got a chance, who pulled down their fences for firewood ; all the more delighted when by doing so their cattle could get out at the opening, and stray. He stepped forward with alacrity, looked about him with a keen discriminating gaze, and took the measure of his company. His name he gave in a loud offensive tone, which the Chairman marked.

‘ William Dalton, what do you desire ? ’ he asked, with a certain edge in his tone in return.

‘ Summat to eat. That’s what I want.’

‘Then why do not you go and get it?’

‘Haven’t got any brass.’

‘Then you must go and earn some money.’

‘Can’t find ought t’ do.’

‘You are able to work.’

‘Aye; I can work, if I could get any.’

‘Why will not the farmers employ you?’

‘’Cause they’ve gotten a spite agin’ me.’

‘Is that the whole truth, Mr. Pearson?’ asked the chairman. ‘Let us have the facts, please.’

Mr. Pearson was one of the elected Guardians of Wybrow.

‘It is not, in my opinion,’ was the answer.

‘Dalton can work, and do as good a day’s work as any man in Wybrow; but the farmers will not employ him. He knows why well enough.’

‘What do you say to that, Dalton?’

‘I know nought about what he means. He owns I can do a day’s work.’

‘Then you know nothing of the farmers’ objections to employing you?’

‘It’s nought but spite,’ he replied savagely.

The chairman looked at Mr. Pearson, as much as to say—‘What is it?’

‘He robs their fences on his way home. And they suspect he takes corn away in his pockets after he has been threshing; although none of them like to search him. They prefer not to employ him; to keep clear of him altogether.’

‘It’s a lee!’ was the comment of the accused.

‘You must not speak like that here, my man,’ said the chairman. ‘You are not dealing with a parish overseer now; but a body of gentlemen who are met to carry out the law.’

Dalton was not in the least abashed.

‘I’m clamming.* I want summat to eat.’

‘Then I am afraid you must pledge your credit; and see if you can find some one to

* Lancashire ‘clemming,’ a well-known word, which means ‘hungering.’

trust you; we cannot relieve you. But I will take the sense of the Board.'

The sense of the Board was unmistakable; every hand was held up against allowing the applicant any relief.

'I am afraid you must apply elsewhere, William Dalton; the Board do not regard you as a proper person to receive relief. The able-bodied poor can have no relief given them out of the house. If you will make an application to be admitted to the workhouse, it will be entertained.'

'What! the Bastille ovver thear?' nodding his head in a certain direction. 'I'll do nought o' th' sort.'

'Then we can do nothing for you. What is the next case, clerk?'

'I'll let ye see whether yo can do nought for me, or not. I'll stop here till ye gie me summat,' was the reply.

'Porter, remove this man!' said the chairman without hesitation.

'Come away,' said the official, putting his hand on the ruffian's collar.

‘I’ll do nought of the sort for yo, nor nought like ye!’ was the gruff answer.

‘Take him away, porter,’ said the chairman.

The porter tried, but failed signally.

The scene was one which could not be tolerated; an example must be made of the ruffian. The police were called in from outside, and after a desperate struggle, in which one policeman got badly bitten, Dalton was handcuffed and disabled.

‘Lock him up, sergeant; and bring him before us to-morrow morning. We will deal with him then.’ Dalton was removed.

‘You see, gentlemen, what we have to deal with. That is a specimen; but we will make an example of the ruffian to-morrow. What is the next case, clerk?’

The business was got through quickly and yet properly; as is usually the case where there is a really efficient chairman, at once clear-headed and decided.

There were one or two more of the Will Dalton type, but they were quieted down considerably by the sight of that hero in

the hands of the police; who were not the only ones who had suffered in the struggle. The spectacle cowed them, and they confined their remonstrances to pleading they were 'clamming'; while two took the offer of the house.

'He is a hard-hearted auld tyrant, th' Canon. He wadn't let the uthers giv' us ought; if they wer' inclined. But mebbe some of these days ther'll be a row. And there's no swearing to slugs. His day may come.' Such was the expression and half-threat of one of the baffled applicants. But they felt that the Board was going to be master. If the Guardians stood firm, they were powerless. It would be no use to try violence. They were in a hopeless minority.

Next day the Canon presided at the magistrates' meeting. Will Dalton was charged with assaulting the police in the discharge of their duty. The charge was heard; the Bench carefully deliberated before the decision was pronounced.

‘ William Dalton,’ said the Canon, with slow speech telling of fixed determination, ‘ you have committed a very grave offence. You came to defy a very important law, which must be carried out firmly. You resisted the officers ordered to remove you : one of whom was severely injured by you. It is our duty to pronounce an exemplary sentence. You, and those who hold your views, must be taught a lesson ; you must go to prison for six months with hard labour.’

For a moment Dalton was staggered by the sentence ; then he again resorted to violence, which was useless.

‘ A specimen, gentlemen, of what we have to deal with. We must do our duty. Anything else on the list, sergeant ?’

The ‘ chargeable labourers ’ of the Wybrow Union took the lesson to heart.

CHAPTER VI.

HAVE ALL MAIDENS HEARTS TO LOSE?

MISS EDITH WHARTON, having taken up her position as her brother's housekeeper, her neighbours felt themselves bound to make the proper calls, in acknowledgment thereof, at Fowrass Grange. Conventionality carries with it some advantages, if it has its drawbacks. If a gentleman contracts a *mésalliance*, the ladies of the neighbourhood do not call upon his wife. By this simple negative act she is told in the most emphatic manner that she is a black sheep; and her neighbours will have none of her. Yet the act is without offensiveness. By simply declining to call she is given to understand in an unmistakable manner that she is a social pariah. It is useless for

the victim to resent the attitude. She is powerless. She might as well attempt to influence the Fates. When the ladies of a locality have decided not to visit a new-comer, they are inflexible, unrelenting, unyielding. The new-comer may live down the opposition if she belong to a sufficiently long-lived family, and can endure the long period of probation requisite for her end. Calls tell of new positions. So her friends called upon Miss Wharton.

One day a carriage drove up to Fowrass Grange, drawn by two red-roan horses. It was very evident the owner of the conspicuous pair was fully conscious that he was somebody; at least in and near Brigstone. So he was too! Stephen Oldfield, of Orton Hall, was a squire and a magistrate of considerable means, and good social position. His father died young, and at an early age Stephen became the head of the Oldfields. The Oldfields thought pretty well of themselves; and in this respect Stephen manifested no degeneracy. He had remained a

bachelor so far ; whether because he could not induce any of the fair sex to take him at his own estimate, or because he had never given his mind to courtship, was a matter on which there was no approach to agreement amidst the gossips of high and low degree around Orton Hall. His leading mental characteristic was he was circumspect. His circumspection revealed itself in everything and everywhere. It spoke in his neat attire ; it was eloquent in his suppressed manner ; the tones of his voice pealed it in muffled chimes. He saw as much of his neighbour's hand as he could ; but never showed his own. He played a good hand at whist ; and he knew it. He was well informed ; and he knew that too. He held a good position ; it was not necessary to inform him of the fact. His consciousness was acute and sleepless. His sister looked up to him as her idol. A man must have something in him when his sister looks up to him with reverence ! Why did not other men's sisters regard him in the same light ?

Perhaps their reverence was such that it overwhelmed and smothered every other feeling!

He is worth a little study : if only as one of a well-marked type of man. He was slight ; he was short ; he was sandy. A very neat, quiet, subdued ; yet self-conscious personage he was. He knew exactly how the little curl of his sandy hair stood out over each ear. He knew his hair came to a neat point at the back of his neck, exactly in the middle line. His clothes were worn with precision ; and came from a first-class London tailor. He constantly looked as if he was going to have his portrait painted.

Mentally his personality was equally pronounced. Prudence is the only virtue which is certain of its reward in this world ! This was the centre-point of his creed. He was exceedingly careful to gain the good opinion of others ; and certainly held his own good opinion as worth winning. He instinctively hated any one who did not care for his opinion. His estimate of

himself was not a lowly one ; and he certainly was a Pharisee. ‘Thank God, I am not as other men are,’ suffused the whole of his being.

All who had transactions with him spoke highly of his integrity. Stephen Oldfield’s good opinion of himself was evidently warranted by the facts. Considerate for all, his sister declared he was the best of brothers ; his domestics pronounced him the best of masters. Squire Wharton gave it as his opinion that Oldfield had more respect for the opinions of his elders than any other young fellow he knew. Nor was this respectful attitude towards his seniors marked by any servility, any approach to humility. The little sandy-haired man always maintained his position—in his own quiet way.

His features were not plain : yet he was not a handsome man. He had a good forehead, a bushy, sandy eyebrow, and under it an eye which was observant. It was rather a difficult eye to describe :

its groundwork was grey, yet the eye was sandy. At the outer rim of the iris was a circle of a darker shade ; while at the pupil there was a distinct line of yellow : that yellow ring which gives steadiness to the gaze. The nose was prominent, and was pointed ; it was cut away, however, at the tip, so that it formed a very obtuse angle with the upper lip, which was long. The mouth was compressed. The whole face had an intent look ; yet its muscles were immobile, trained to keep still, as carefully as ever pointer was trained. There was much individuality about the man ; considerable force of character ; and intense self-consciousness. His manner was studied. He looked you gravely in the face when addressed, not a quiver of a fibre of any of the muscles of expression escaped his ken. He read the faces of those with whom he came into contact, like the pages of an open book. Yet no one seemed to regard him as a genius. His name was not in the mouths of men as a coming man ;

there was no transcendent ability about him. Yet no one ever spoke of him in any contemptuous tone, or affected to hold him cheap. He was a staunch Tory ; this did not require any positive action from him ; he stood on a strong defensive position. He could criticize the proposals of the Whigs from this position. It was impossible to convince him. He could stand argument, reason, persuasion ; and withstand them. He was as immovable as a rock. ‘A safe, sound Tory without any fancies,’ was the judgment of his neighbours about him. As a magistrate he kept himself in the background, yet he was never out of view ; as a junior he gave his opinion last. When the sides were equally balanced this often gave him the casting vote. Indeed it had become recognized that his opinion often gave the decision. He was not unaware of this fact. Wherever he was he was not a cipher ; he was a numeral. But you might place as many ciphers behind the numeral as you pleased ; the

number did not disturb him. How many ciphers stood behind the numeral in his heart of hearts, no one ever knew ; probably he had never calculated himself. His precise value in the eye of his Maker will only be revealed at the last assize, when all hearts are opened.

This prim, formal personage was accompanied by a lady, so closely resembling him that a casual glance told she was his sister. They were not twins, but they might have been. The external likeness was not the only likeness between the two ; mentally they were alike, allowing for the differences between the male and the female mind. Miss Oldfield, though so like her brother, was plainer ; perhaps her mind stood in something of the same kind of relation to her brother's as did their respective features. Women always spoke kindly of her ; and she was certainly obliging. Whether she had ever had an offer or not, was unknown to any one but herself ; it was never a topic of

conversation either in her presence — or out of it.

The Oldfields were a well-to-do county family, who were present at the county balls; and sat on the raised benches beside the Judges when they attended the assizes. Squire Oldfield's carriage with its red-roans was well known at Sheffield, and even at Wakefield. It was not unlikely that some day he would be pricked by the Lord-Lieutenant for High Sheriff. They visited a good deal, and were particular about whom they visited. Had any test been required as to the position of the Whartons when John had decided upon farming his own land, it would have been furnished by the action of the Oldfields. Their carriage at Fowrass Grange was a distinct intimation that John Wharton was still a gentleman if a farmer. No other evidence was required.

They alighted, and were shown into the drawing-room on one side of the hall, where Miss Wharton received them after a little while.

‘You will find my brother in the dining-room with the Rev. Mr. Pryor,’ remarked Miss Wharton. She did not appear to wish to be rid of the gentleman; yet clearly she was in no way anxious to induce him to remain with them in preference to joining the gentlemen.

The gentlemen knew each other well, and the greeting was brief.

‘We are talking over our meeting the other day. It went off very successfully; we think,’ said Mr. Pryor.

‘I share that opinion with you,’ said Mr. Oldfield; looking very much like an incarnate note of interrogation.

‘That is our view as elected guardians. It is a novel union of the magistrates and the representatives of the ratepayers,’ said Wharton rather awkwardly. ‘Mr. Pryor and I were speculating as to how far the magistrates were prepared to accept their new colleagues.’

‘It is an important national work on which we are engaged; which will require

the best energies of both classes of guardians, the representative as well as the *ex-officio*, for its satisfactory execution. We shall be glad of any suggestions, you may be sure,' was the response.

'The Canon is evidently determined to stand no nonsense from the old "chargeable labourers."'

'That impudent scoundrel Dalton was soon disposed of. He deserved his sentence,' said the Rector.

'I am glad you think so. We felt a great responsibility in forming our decision. The Canon thought a distinctive sentence, even if it seemed somewhat harsh, was real mercy to the class; and would prevent others from following in Dalton's footsteps.'

'Well, they will find his footsteps on the treadmill, if they are anxious to tread in them,' commented Wharton without any intention to pun.

'You have put it rather happily,' said Mr. Oldfield, who evidently had his own reasons for cultivating John Wharton; yet it was

not natural sympathy which drew them together.

‘The new Poor Law is a great boon in every way so far as I can see,’ went on the Rector. ‘Look at that poor fellow Weatheral who has just become chargeable to the rates. He came here a year or two ago with his wife and a child. He was a steady fellow, but she was a shiftless creature: they never had a penny. He fell ill the other week, soon his credit was exhausted, and his wife had to apply for relief. Under the old plan he must have been conveyed to Ashbourne, to which he belongs; a long journey which would have taken three days in his condition slowly plodding through the Derbyshire hills. As it is, we relieve him, and the amount is charged to Ashbourne. The whole cost of keeping him till he is well, will be less than the cost of conveying him would have been.’

‘Quite so. Out-door relief in such a case is quite proper. It was its being given to able-bodied fellows which made it so

objectionable under the old law. The old law went by the name of the 43rd of Elizabeth. It seems our Poor Law dates back to that time. I know the fact; but I am in ignorance how it comes to be so.'

John Wharton declared he could throw no light upon the subject.

'What do you say, Mr. Pryor?' continued the interrogator, fixing his gaze upon the Rector.

'I fancy the question is mixed up with the dissolution of the monasteries. They seemed to have the poor under their protection. When they were abolished it became necessary to do something in the matter; but there was something more than that. The poor were recognized in the tithe. The Church took a third, the incumbent a third; while the other third went to the poor. *Passere gregem verbo, exemplo, cibo*: that was the duty of the clergyman in the days of old.'

'Indeed! how very interesting. I did not know that before;,' continued the Justice

of the Peace, 'I do not think you will forget any of the three now, Mr. Pryor.'

'Fortunately the "*cibo*" is also within my power. With many of my poorer brethren, the two first alone are possible. Yet there is no denying a little of the last,—a little appeal to the stomach predisposes the brain to listen patiently to the word, and to consider the example.' The Rector evidently was a student of human nature. 'However, I must be going, and say good-bye to you two gentlemen. The duties of guardian must be subordinate to and not superior to the other duties of the pastor. The sick have more than material wants; the word in season is desirable.' So saying, the rector departed.

'Shall we join the ladies?' asked Wharton.

'With pleasure.'

'We will let Pryor have his word with them first, though.'

'Certainly. How is Miss Wharton? Has she recovered her wonted good health

with her stay in the south? She had a long strain upon her.'

'She is quite strong, thank you. She is taking up the subject of horseback exercise. Uncle Edward has doubled the allowance made to her from the canal shares.' (He knew he need not explain what the allowance was, or what the reference to the canal shares meant, to his auditor.) 'He thinks my farming operations may not be very remunerative, and he does not want Edith to be pinched.'

'How very considerate of him!'

'He is a kind, generous fellow. As she has made up her mind to settle with me; she thought the only use the money could be put to was to have a horse, so as to ride about with me.'

'Capital! Miss Wharton will look well on horseback. I must congratulate her upon her decision. She will make a famous horsewoman, I know.'

Here the front-door could be heard to close, as the Rector passed out, and

the gentlemen turned to the drawing-room.

Fowrass Grange was rather small as a country house. It had a central hall with a room on each side, each with a large mullioned window; above these were bedrooms also with mullioned windows; and above these again were dormer windows. If small it was a *bijou* residence; and it was one of those houses which stretch backwards, and cover more space than is apparent at first sight. Its windows looked out upon a lawn, pretty thickly covered with evergreen shrubs; with a drive down to the road, at a distance of some sixty yards.

‘Spring is coming upon us,’ said Mr. Oldfield. ‘I hope it will be favourable to the agricultural interest. You have a pleasant view from the window; I don’t think I ever noticed it so distinctly before.’ Possibly not: Fowrass Grange never had occupied so much of Mr. Oldfield’s thoughts until lately. ‘Miss Wharton,’ he said impressively, ‘I must congratulate you

on your appearance. You seem quite strong.'

The amber-hued blonde did indeed look well in her mourning attire, which seemed to become her. Mr. Oldfield was perfectly sincere in his enthusiastic address. Her features seemed to possess a more distinct maturity, a full development of expression, which Mr. Oldfield thought he had never observed before.

'I am very well, thank you,' she replied.

'Then do you like the north after your experience in the south? I am afraid we lose by the comparison.'

'I do not think so. Cousin Barbara will not admit that the north folk are in any way inferior to the southern. It is a great point with her.'

'And do you share her opinion?'

'On the whole, I think I do.'

'You are going to have a horse of your own, and ride,' went on the Squire: he was very soon away from the Lady Barbara. 'So your brother tells me.'

‘Yes, I have been thinking it will be pleasant to ride out with my brother. The climate of Brigstone is not favourable to the roads, and walking. I shall often be able to get out on horseback when I could not possibly go out on foot.’

‘I am afraid the roads here do not compare favourably with those of Stanmore. On the slope there they are soon dry. You see you are critical about our roads since you have had an experience elsewhere.’

The lady did not seem particularly interested in these comparisons, and the conversation had no great charm for her. Yet Mr. Oldfield was doing his best to be agreeable. He observed the slight change of expression on her features, and changed his front.

‘Have you got a steed yet, Miss Wharton, or are you still looking about for one?’

‘My brother has seen nothing to his mind yet. It must meet with his approval before it will be submitted for mine.’

‘It will not be easy to find the horse for

you, Miss Wharton. It must be handsome, of course; safe and trustworthy. Your brother will be careful about that, I am sure.'

'Yes; I think he is too exigent. He will never obtain the perfect animal he has set his mind on; at least not at the price I am willing to give.'

'But you must do yourself justice with your horse, Miss Wharton. A good-looking horse costs no more to keep than a plain one. It is only the first cost.'

'But that first cost is a consideration. I am not rich. If I had a fortune I might do as I pleased.'

'You possess what is better than mere wealth.' Miss Wharton looked inquiringly at the speaker; a tendency to undervalue riches had never been a conspicuous element in the Oldfields. 'You have qualities which throw riches into the shade.'

'I was not aware of them,' she answered rather coldly.

'You would accuse me of flattery if I

told you what I think, so I must refrain from saying it. I should not like to forfeit your good opinion of my sincerity.'

'I am afraid flattery would be wasted upon me ; if I recognized it was flattery, of course. If I did not, then my vanity would be gratified, I dare say.' The last remark was made rather as the continuation of the thought than as a deliberate utterance.

'Truth is not flattery, Miss Wharton. There can be no insincerity in speaking the truth. Nature has been bountiful to you in many ways.'

This was said with a certain amount of *empressment*. Miss Wharton began to realize the position, and felt it a little awkward. Mr. Oldfield had always exhibited a preference for her ; he now evidently was in earnest as a suitor.

It is always somewhat of the nature of a surprise to a girl when brought face to face with a lover, who is gradually bringing his parallels nearer and nearer. She is in a sense like a beleaguered fortress ; the

besiegers gradually complete the circuit; then their lines creep closer and closer. With the latter, however, the intention is obvious. With a girl who is being courted it is not so easy to be certain about the gentleman's intentions; consequently she must wait, she cannot act till the proposal is made. Especially is this the case where a certain amount of intimacy has long existed. With a comparatively new acquaintance it is not difficult to distinguish clearly when the attentions pass from mere politeness to something more distinctly personal. If disposed she can arrest the progress by an attitude of distance; but when the gentleman stands on the footing of an old friend, one known familiarly from early years, a cool distance is not always so easily maintained. Mr. Oldfield was evidently advancing a nearer parallel. Miss Wharton gave an almost imperceptible start as the change in the tone struck her. This is courtship, — was the conclusion flashed upon her. She had no intention of being courted. What

was she to do? Yes: what was to be done?

John Wharton was talking to Miss Oldfield, who was listening with evident attention. The topic was the new poor-law, and its probable effect upon the ranks of pauperism. There was no courtship going on there, evidently; so Miss Wharton thought. Old Lady Barbara would not have been so confident. To be an attentive listener is a subtle flattery; especially when the speaker is pursuing a topic on which he feels keenly. Miss Oldfield really wanted to know something of the subject, and was as absorbed in what John Wharton was saying almost as himself. Hearer and speaker were mutually interested; so Miss Wharton could scarcely break in upon their *tête-à-tête*. She must fall back upon herself; and she adopted a line which never fails any one in a dilemma, and especially a woman in a difficulty like the present.

‘I cannot say that I quite comprehend you,’ was the answer.

This threw upon the speaker the onus of further explanation; without making the said explanation at all easy. It was quite clear Miss Wharton was not going to advance, to say nothing of meeting him half-way; as she might have done, if disposed.

Cautious, circumspect as he habitually was, Stephen Oldfield felt he must plunge; nothing else was feasible in the emergency. So he plunged.

‘Surely, Miss Wharton,’ he said, ‘you are conscious that nature has given you many attractions? But if you do not realize the fact, others do—at least I do,’ lowering his voice.

This was a very decided plunge; especially from a person with Mr. Oldfield’s qualities. It virtually was a proposal; a very guarded proposal truly; a proposal at arm’s length; a stretching out the hand no further than admitted of its readily being withdrawn.

Time cannot be measured by the chronometer at such moments; a second seems half a lifetime. Miss Wharton seemed to

be passing through a long experience, to judge by her sensations. She was not prepared for decisive action. She had long been aware that Stephen Oldfield looked upon her as a potential Mrs. Oldfield ; but the prospect had never seemed to be near enough to call for any serious thought. But here behold, the distance had become measurable. She had no time for proper consideration on the spot ; she must make an answer. This answer, as might be expected, was of the nature of a compromise. It was neither definite encouragement to proceed, nor did it block any further advances.

‘It is very kind of you to say so ; but then you are partial to me, Mr. Oldfield. I know you always were most polite to me when quite a little child ; you are an old friend, you know.’ This left the matter in abeyance. She had taken up no definite attitude.

Mr. Oldfield was not clear whether this meant that he was still to regard himself as

in the position of an old friend ; or he might consider the admission as establishing him on such a footing as admitted of his advancing to something more. In such times of emergency the mind is apt to take its view from the standpoint of the inclinations. Stephen Oldfield decided that he might hope to be some day something more than an old family friend : but that the lady was not disposed to give him any distinct encouragement just then. Whether Miss Wharton meant this, or not, was not so clear. When she came to think all over, perhaps she might take the contrary view. However, her end was served so far as extricating herself from the immediate dilemma.

Inspired by hope Mr. Oldfield proceeded :

‘I hope our friendship will permit of my saying that when you get your horse, you and your brother will include Orton Hall within the range of your rides. Mr. Wharton,’ he said, breaking in upon his conversation with Miss Oldfield, ‘I hope you and Miss Wharton will not omit Orton

Hall in your list of riding excursions. I am sure my sister and I will be very glad to see you whenever you can call.'

'I hope you will come, Mr. Wharton. Do promise me, Edith, that you will come. Miss Oldfield adopted a conventional prefix to Mr. Wharton's name, while she gave Miss Wharton her Christian name. This passed unnoticed.

The promise was given and the visitors departed. John Wharton thought no more about the visit. His sister, however, carried with her a vivid remembrance that Stephen Oldfield had made an advance, a clear and definite advance towards a proposal,—the shadow thrown forward. Really his remark bore the same relation to a definite proposal that the outside signals at a railway station bear to the inner signals. He had then passed the outer signals on his way to Miss Wharton's hand; and she realized this. When would he attempt the inner signals? She felt that her lack of decision had rendered her liable to a proposal from him.

She must regard him as a suitor for her hand, she began to see. What should she say when the next advance was made? She was angry with herself. She did not see how she could have acted otherwise; and yet she was dissatisfied. She had no intention of saying 'Yes:' and such being the case, she must say 'No' when the time came. When would it come?

CHAPTER VII.

PROBABLY THEY HAVE.

THE thought of what had occurred at that, to her, memorable visit troubled Miss Wharton exceedingly. We must remember she was only just twenty-one; and that her experience had not been that of many sophisticated town girls, who at that age are familiar with suitors and offers. An experienced damsel of the present day would quickly dismiss such a matter from her mind, if not from her memory; and feel quite equal to the emergency when the definite proposal came, whenever that might be. But not so Edith Wharton; who belonged to an earlier epoch, when being engaged meant something more than a recognized position, and a right to seek each other's society—until it could be

broken off if desirable. A proposal and an engagement were in those days the end of a courtship, almost as sacred as marriage itself (the *Verlobung* of the Germans); not the formal commencement of courtship,—as it has now become. An engagement is now nothing more than a sort of feeler of each other's inclinations,—a permission to examine into each other's ways and thoughts by an intimacy otherwise impossible. It is a sanction to a tentative courtship; not the indication that the courtship has culminated in a step that can scarcely be retraced.

Edith Wharton now felt the want of a mother's counsel as she stood alone. Probably if her mother had been living this unpleasant episode could never have happened at all. She could not speak to her brother on the subject. That Stephen Oldfield would be some day a suitor for Edith's hand was a matter tacitly recognized by all. He was distinctly eligible, even to freedom from vicious practices;

and there was even a sense of fitness in such union. There was nothing which had transpired that could be made an excuse for limiting the friendly intercourse betwixt Orton Hall and Fowrass Grange. Yet the episode allowed Stephen Oldfield to throw a certain tenderness into his polite attentions to Miss Wharton, which she recognized; and which he knew she recognized. Yet this link was irksome to her, and certainly did not tend to produce a better understanding between them. Like a great many scheming persons, Mr. Oldfield looked down the line of facts in the light of his wishes. He did not grasp the idea that, looked down by the light of Miss Wharton's feelings, their aspect might be widely different. He realized that he had placed himself in a position from which advances could readily be made; he did not equally clearly realize that his attentions were not much appreciated by the lady. He had stolen a march upon her, and done it very artfully too; but he miscalculated the girl

he had to deal with. An ordinary girl might have recognized the position, but decided to let the matter drift, trusting to chance to help her out; and if no such rescue turned up, reconciled herself to her fate, on the what's-done-can't-be-helped argument. But such was not Edith Wharton's way of looking at the matter. She felt injured by the march stolen upon her; it was not quite fair, she felt. He had taken her at an advantage, and evidently meant to stick to the claim which had then been implied, rather than admitted in her evasive answer. Why could not she have said something else, been more self-possessed? This was a question she asked herself hundreds of times: and the more she turned the matter over in her mind, the more she resented it; and the more her heart hardened against the man who had stolen the march on her. It was a very clever step on the part of Mr. Oldfield; but it just happened that it really was a step backwards, and not forwards.

At last a horse was found to John Wharton's mind, a bay with black points. A nice lady's horse in all respects; good-tempered, gentle, with a small clean head, and a nose small and brown, like a deer's. Probably it had some Arab blood in it; it looked like it. It soon established itself as a prime favourite with all. The groom doted on it. Luke Ellwood gave it as his opinion that—

‘It's just the varra nag for the young lady. If ye searched Yorkshire through ye couldn't find a mair suitable herse; and well she luiks on its back; they're the bonniest pair ye'll see anywhere. And it is as sure-footed as it's good-looking.’

Sometimes, when the weather was too bad for her to get out, Luke would ride ‘Daisy’ through the fields to see to the stock; and the care he would take of her was quite motherly. The feeling of attachment was mutual.

‘It's as wise as a body,’ he would say, ‘and a sight mair to be trusted than a many.’

As to Miss Wharton, she was very proud

of 'Daisy,' who carried her so easily, and was so graceful.

John Wharton began to think the old horse which had been his father's, and which used to draw the little old-fashioned four-wheel (a phaeton), for him and Mrs. Wharton, and afterwards Mrs. Wharton and her daughter, getting altogether too antiquated for his requirements. Luke argued it would be just the horse for the farm, to cart the coals from the collieries a few miles away, and do the odd jobs; and he would take good care of it. The last sealed the old horse's fate. John could not bear the idea of parting with him, for fear he might find a hard lot somewhere; but with Luke he was safe from ill-usage. Of course this entailed a new investment. He soon found a steed to his mind, a dark-brown horse of great power, a hunter that did not take kindly to his fences. 'That will constitute no drawback with me,' thought the would-be purchaser. 'I shan't take any fences.'

So he bought the horse, and the brother and sister now rode out together regularly. They commonly rode up to Gaythorne Hall, as Uncle Edward wished to see how the new steeds went on ; especially Edith's.

‘She and the horse are a regular picture,’ Mrs. Allonby would say ; ‘don’t you think so, sir ?’

Mrs. Allonby was Squire Wharton’s factotum.

‘And a handsome picture too,’ he would add. ‘Miss Wharton sits so straight and square. Though she is my niece, she is the handsomest girl in South Yorkshire. Daisy seems quite proud to carry you, Edie,’ he would remark. ‘I declare she is.’

‘Then the pride must be mutual, uncle ; for I am sure I am proud of her.’

‘Have you been to Orton Hall lately ? What do the Oldfields say ? Stephen is a good judge of a horse. In fact he has good judgment all round.’ (It was quite clear that Mr. Oldfield had an ally in the Squire.)

‘He is very complimentary on the subject. Almost too much so; it makes me uncomfortable.’

The Squire cast a keen look at his niece; for he noticed the remark, and the tone in which it was uttered.

‘Oh, he is an old friend. His criticism and compliment are both natural, both go free. Young ladies are apt to be exacting, and so very particular at times.’

Edith made no remark. That a marriage betwixt Mr. Oldfield and herself would meet with her uncle’s sanction, and even favour, she knew well enough. She felt that she stood on ground which gave her admirer the advantage; which he took. It was not generous of him, she felt. His whole conduct was scarcely that of the man she would wish to marry. Something to look up to, not to look down upon: that was the natural lord of a lady like Edith Wharton.

When they visited Orton Hall its Squire was all attention. Under the cover of

admiring Daisy, he could pay astute compliments to the lady on her back.

‘There is a natural sense of fitness betwixt you and your steed, Miss Wharton. She is such a handsome well-bred little mare, and carries you so well.’ The inference was unmistakable. ‘You seem on excellent terms.’

Daisy was very fond of a biscuit, a piece of bread, or even an apple. This predilection was never forgotten. She would sniff about if something was not forthcoming, in a most suggestive manner.

‘Want something, Daisy?’ the observant swain would say. ‘I’ll get you something.’

It is possible to court a lady through her steed, if so minded. So an equine *bonne bouche* would be forthcoming, which Daisy would munch with a relish which was unmistakable.

‘She has a very amiable disposition, your mare, Miss Wharton,’ the Squire once continued, after Daisy had finished her little repast; ‘it is quite remarkable.’

‘I am afraid it is more than can be said of her mistress,’ was the response.

‘Do you know, Miss Wharton, you are given to depreciate yourself; you do yourself injustice.’

This was said with a marked *empressement*, implying the right of the speaker to address her in the manner he did. It was one of those tugs at the chain which connected them that roused Miss Wharton’s ire, and she resented it.

‘I do not know why you object to my speaking the truth about myself. You seem to assume that I am amiable. I know that I am not!’ (And at that moment she certainly did not look so either. Her appearance bore out her words.) The Squire took a note of this, but went on.

‘Is it fair, or right to be unjust to yourself, any more than to some one else? I question it.’

‘I wish you would not persist in holding me better than I am,’ she replied rather pettishly. ‘It worries me.’

‘I am sure I am the last person who would do anything against your wishes, Miss Wharton. I have no desire to do so.’

What was she to do with such a man; who understood so well the soft answer which turneth away wrath? It was impossible to say anything more on the subject. But the soft answer of some men, if it makes wrath impossible at the time, only fans it into a steadier glow. This was Mr. Oldfield’s error, and one he constantly made,—his besetting sin. Because the answer prevented any outbreak or exhibition at the time, the feeling only rankled in the other person’s mind. He thought he had cleverly disposed of the difficulty; really he only put it away for the time—to brood. This constantly making her feel the bond, and leaving her so that she could not in common politeness take overt notice of it, began to chafe on Miss Wharton. Her feelings towards her suitor were taking shape; but it is to be feared it was the shape of dislike.

He calculated very carefully the position. He knew that the world,—at least that portion of the world immediately surrounding Orton Hall and Fowrass Grange, looked upon the intimacy existing betwixt the Oldfields and the Whartons as the prelude to closer relations in the not far distant future. It had grown accustomed to associate Mr. Oldfield and Miss Wharton together, as a matter of course. It would end in a match, everybody said. His attentions were skillfully measured. There was just that amount of personality in them which a single man may pay to a lady of his acquaintance, which shows, in northern country phrase, ‘that there is something between them’; but it gives no indication of the dimensions of the something. And yet it was not more than courteous politeness. His gradual recognition of this relation made it increasingly difficult to the lady to retreat or escape from the position into which she was being edged. That Mr. Oldfield should be all politeness was looked upon

by all as a matter of course. When the old Squire asked his niece if they had been at Orton Hall lately, his inquiry was made as if it was natural that he should ask that question; as if something underlay the question which it was unnecessary to put into words. It was an astute line of attack; but whether it was the form of assault to carry that particular virgin-fortress may be questioned. If the lady had rested upon popular opinion for her convictions, she must have yielded. But a careful observer would doubt how far this line of attack was adapted to the case of a lady with Marston blood in her, and decidedly given to think for herself. The besieger was pursuing a plan which would drive most birds into his net; a slow, steady sap and mine, the most certain of all forms of siege. Time would fight for him, he felt.

The position in which Mr. Oldfield thus placed Miss Wharton is one by no means uncommon even yet in remote rural areas; but which was more frequent in past times,

when travelling was less easy, and areas were more localized. It is one which tells hardly upon the lady. There is a certain understanding, vague but recognized; and the outer world knows it. Consequently any other suitor is warned off; to pay the lady any attentions is pretty much like poaching. It would not be quite an honourable action to break in upon the gentleman's preserves. With the lady thus hedged off, time fights for the gentleman. Whether it is quite an honourable line for a gentleman to take is another question. All is fair in love and war! But it is a very safe line, and usually ends in success. The lady reconciles herself to the arrangement in time, a formal engagement follows; and shortly after that the irrevocable step, and the lady is finally secured. All depends upon how far the friends on each side favour the prospect of a union. If they do not look favourably upon it, the scheme breaks down; if they are in favour of it, the lady is sooner or later won over; they court for

the gentleman, and the lady sooner or later succumbs. It was quite clear in this case the Whartons and Oldfields were in favour of such alliance; and it became tacitly understood that the match would come off when the two contracting parties could make up their minds. In this instance the gentleman had made up his mind distinctly enough, and only waited the favourable opportunity. The lady had not made up hers, however; and so far as she had travelled towards a decision, it was against Mr. Oldfield.

Thus matters stood, and time went on without any change or advance being made. Mr. Oldfield was not the kind of man to lay himself open to be refused when he proposed to a lady; so he bided his time. Miss Wharton was a lady who, if young, possessed much force of character, and was scarcely likely to capitulate to any siege, however persistently pushed on; and when she communed with her own heart, which she frequently did, she could not find that her

feelings towards Mr. Oldfield grew warmer as time flew. Nevertheless she recognized the position in which she was placed. Had her mother still lived, she would soon have extricated her from the dilemma ; but that active brain, that loving heart, were mouldering in the grave. But her wise plan of forming her daughter's character survived her, and her lessons were not lost upon her in deciding upon action.

Matters thus stood still, nearing some solution of the problem of course ; an end being one day involved in the flight of time. So long as no one else appeared on the field Mr. Oldfield felt pretty secure of ultimate success ; but a new factor entered into the position, very gradually, insensibly, and apparently unnoticed by all.

The railway system was extending. London was united to Birmingham ; and then the Grand Junction was to unite Birmingham to the Manchester and Liverpool Company by a line running in at Newton Bridge. A proposal to join Sheffield to Manchester was set on foot,

and a firm of surveyors were working at the district to see how the line must run. John Wharton was in favour of such a scheme, while his uncle was tooth and nail opposed to it. Among the surveyors engaged was one George Ashworth, a junior partner in the firm. He was a tall, lithe, active fellow, with a keen, quick eye; dark and sinewy, capable of immense labour; sanguine, and ambitious. He was the son of a Lincolnshire clergyman who farmed his own glebe; a father who made all the provision for his progeny of which his circumstances would permit. He belonged to a fairly good family, but not occupying quite such a good social position as the Whartons. On first sight it was easy to see the young surveyor was a gentleman. John Wharton met him casually; and as they fell into conversation, their views on many important matters were found to be very similar. The natural result followed, and George Ashworth was invited to dine at Fowrass Grange.

From that time he came to be a frequent visitor, always welcome. The conversation ran commonly on the feasibility of making the proposed line ; at other times on the work of the reformed parliament. Miss Wharton sat with her large wooden knitting-needles, working steadily away at some woollen comforter, or wrap, for some old man or woman near by. She listened, as ladies like to listen to the conversation of gentlemen whenever they get the opportunity ; further, it made a change, and the evenings were very quiet at Fowrass Grange. In the day there was the ride, or a walk in the fields, or a visit to the Rectory, or Gaythorne Hall ; or a visit to read awhile to some invalid, or bed-ridden person among the poor ; or if wet to go to the Grange Farm and watch Mrs. Ellwood in her dairy, or maybe to make a few pats of butter if churning was going on. But the evenings were very quiet, and George Ashworth made an agreeable diversion. Still not even Mr. Oldfield saw underneath this

friendship betwixt the gentlemen, anything which would affect Miss Wharton. John Wharton held advanced views; but that was permissible, a mere eccentricity in a man who was bound by family ties to the governing classes. George Ashworth was a man who, if a gentleman by birth and breeding, worked for a living. Advanced views in him were quite another matter. He was a radical, a reformer: one of those men who wished to overturn the car of state in order to see what might fall to them in the confusion. Had he aspired to Miss Wharton's hand, it was certain the Squire would put his foot on the matter and suppress it at once. It was not even likely that John Wharton would be prepared to accept the young surveyor as a brother-in-law. There was no evidence that he looked upon Miss Wharton in any other light than the future Mrs. Oldfield; as all around Brigstone assumed. Further, no one supposed for a moment that Miss Wharton had any objection to become Mrs. Oldfield. Mr. Oldfield

seemed indifferent about the visits of the young surveyor, even if he knew of them.

The conversation related to anything but courting or love-making ; it never ran on sentiment or poetry ; it was as practical and realistic as the young surveyor's measuring-chain. The tunnel which would be necessary to pierce the mountain ridge at Dunton Bridge, the heavy ascent from Sheffield ; the probable opposition of the landowners like Squire Wharton, who would not sell an inch of ground if possible ; or what was being done, or had been done at Westminster—such were the topics. They recounted the triumphs of the Whig ministry : and pointed with pride to the new poor-law ; the abolition of negro slavery ; the movements made for the relief of the 'white slaves' in factories and mines, and especially the unfortunate children who were terribly overworked in both. Lord Ashley had taken the poor little white-slave child under his care ; and white and black were both to be free. Or they discussed the

question of education, and the effect it would have upon the nation. The mere mustard-seed of a beginning had been made by Parliament voting a small sum, some £30,000 for educational purposes.

‘It is the beginning, anyhow,’ John Wharton went on; ‘but it must take a considerable time before the educational movement can tell. The children affected by it must grow up before they can exercise any influence. I am inclined to think more immediate results will follow from the reduction of the newspaper tax. Fourpence constituted a prohibitory tax, and forbade a cheap newspaper; but now that the tax is reduced to a penny it will be possible to have newspapers at twopence: and then even the artisan can have his own newspaper.’

‘It will have a good effect throughout the country. As we go about we see a good deal of what goes on. In the little villages you will often find a newspaper left weekly at one of the inns, usually a

Tory paper. On asking how they come to take it, the answer is, "Oh, it comes every week, we know nothing about it; there is never any charge made for it." And on inquiry it turns out that the leading Tory peer of the neighbourhood has a number of inns, to which a newspaper is sent gratis.'

'I see; educates the people to hold the right views by sending the only newspaper which penetrates the neighbourhood. It is not a bad piece of tactics; represents to the free and independent voters the right aspect of things. But the new act in reducing the newspaper stamp will rather upset that astute arrangement.'

'I don't know that the Tory squires are to be blamed for their conduct. The existing state of affairs suits them; they have got their interests to look after, and they look after them. I should probably feel with them if I were one of them. Your brother is an exception to the class to which he belongs, Miss Wharton!'

'How am I to take that, Mr. Ashworth?

My uncle holds the opposite views; and I am sure Uncle Edward is a good and a kind man. My brother is the same: yet they never agree about this question of reform.'

'It is not so much a question of right and wrong, as a question of feeling. One man holds one set of views; another man another. For instance, we surveyors are most variously regarded. In one place we find the people quite ready to believe that a railroad would be a good thing for the district; while in other places the farmers and their men will come with pitchforks and other weapons, and drive us away, because they think a railroad would injure them.

'How strange!' And then the feminine intellect would once more turn itself to the knitting, and apparently become oblivious of the topic of conversation.

'It is no doubt a question of interests to a very large extent. The reformers have always inveighed against class legislation; and

asserted that if our legislators are derived mainly from the land-owning class, and the property qualification is maintained, so long the said legislators will look after the landed interests. That of course is the *raison d'être* of the Corn Laws. And naturally they have exhibited no inclination to ease the burdens of manufacturers. The reduction of the duty on paper is an evidence that the present parliament does not maintain the old attitude of hostility to producers. It is a step in the right direction, in that respect, and also in another. The cost of books and newspapers will be considerably reduced by it. Cheap books and cheap newspapers will soon be quite common. This will be a great boon to the working classes, and give a stimulus to the Mechanics' Institutions springing up everywhere; but it will bring with it some alloy: there is no such thing as unalloyed good in this imperfect world. What do you say on the subject, Mr. Ashworth?'

‘I think the movement is in the right direction. Very likely we will get a number of noisy fellows who will produce a good deal of disturbance, and furnish the Tories with arguments in their favour. That can scarcely be helped. You rarely get a piece of rich alluvial land by a river-edge, but you find a bit of marsh here and there. But for all that we do not object to the arrangement, upon the whole : we would rather take the marsh with the flat than be without both.’

‘Yes, but the Tory will only see the marsh, on which his eye will be steadily fixed ; and he will take his stand accordingly. In every movement likely to benefit the people at large he detects lurking danger to the landed interest.’

Such and such like were the conversations which went on ; but soon Mr. Ashworth had to shift his quarters, and left the neighbourhood of Brigstone for a position nearer the Manchester end of the proposed railway. Surely there was nothing here

to militate against Mr. Oldfield's interests. Cupid could never shelter himself behind such prosaic matters as railroads and politics. Besides, Mr. Ashworth knew that Miss Wharton was as good as engaged to Squire Oldfield. He himself might be engaged for anything the Whartons knew. Yet somehow it was no uncommon thing for the Whartons on a quiet evening to wish Mr. Ashworth were near them again, so that he could drop in as of yore: Miss Wharton joining in her brother's regret without reserve.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST PEAL OF THUNDER.

THE life led at Fowrass Grange was as quiet as that led by the denizens of Gaythorne Hall, and Orton Hall respectively. It was a quiet and perhaps humdrum life, as some might choose to think it, when the stage-coach rattling past was the incident of the day; and when the guard's horn had not given way to the more piercing but less melodious railway-whistle. John Wharton, gentleman-farmer, had prospered; first, because the seasons were good; and secondly, because the advice of old John Holroyd to keep the place 'the green side up,' and always 'to buy stock from above and not below,' was rigidly adhered to in both instances. Nor did he, or his man

Luke either for that matter, feel disposed to call in the plough though the price of wheat kept steadily rising.

‘Won’t the price of wheat tempt you to plough out that pasture, Jack?’ inquired his uncle one day. ‘My rent-audit came off well the other day. The times are good; manufacturers are busy and paying good wages; their work-folk can buy freely; and, thanks to the Corn Laws, the farmers are prospering.’

The Squire knew the allusion to the Corn Laws was like treading on his toes; but he resolved not to deny himself his say. If the seasons continued as they had been for the last two years, farming, and especially tillage, would pay very well.

‘I am very glad to hear it, uncle, both for the farmers’ sakes and your own; but I am satisfied. The experiment has been successful; and I have been the better for it in many respects. I have had to look into many matters that I merely glanced at before; and consequently seen many

things I should otherwise probably not have noticed. But I am not yet a convert to the Corn Laws : indeed my opinion has not changed about them at all.'

'But surely you see that good trade and busy manufacture give good wages, and the working people can readily buy the loaf at the present price ; and that helps the landed interest : and we all profit by it : all round.'

'Yes, in favourable times when wages are good, and the harvests plentiful, the objections to the Corn Laws are not so obvious as they become under opposite circumstances. However, I am not going to set my sails to the Corn Law winds.'

'Spoken like a Wharton and a Marston in one. Verily, Jack, thou art an obstinate, self-willed fellow ; and I don't believe all the arguments I can bring to bear upon thee will make any impression.'

'My dear uncle, we will never agree upon that head. But what do you say to the working of the new Poor Laws ?'

‘What have I to say? That I think the seasons have been much in their favour. If we had had slack times and bad harvests, we would have heard more of our departed friend, “the chargeable labourer.” I don’t often attend the Board of Guardians: how are you getting on there?’

‘We are now working out Lord John Russell’s new Act on the General Registration of Births, Deaths, and Marriages. It seems a useful Act.’

‘Oh, of course it is if it is the work of the Reformed Whig Parliament; it could not help but be good. How much better is it than the old Parish Register kept in the Church?’

‘That can still be kept. But the clergy did not always keep their record very carefully. For instance, they entered the date of the christening; but they did not always say how old the infant was. And there was no machinery for collecting the dates. Now each registrar keeps his book, and annually all will be taken together and the

result published. We shall know where we are nationally.'

'As a testimony to the prosperity of the country under the Whig reformers. Perhaps after all Providence, and the good seasons, have had something to do with this national prosperity. How will it be if the seasons take a turn?'

'They very likely will; seasons run in cycles, and I should not be at all surprised if we have a series of indifferent harvests.'

'Wouldn't you? But if bad seasons do come upon us you will see what will be the effect upon these reformers you seem so wrapt up in. You'll find out how many more mouths there will be to feed: your new registration will tell you that.'

'Then we had better know it; and then the foreign farmers will know how many to provide for. If the English acres remain the same, and there are so many more mouths to fill, the more need of foreign corn.' The old Squire perceived that this line of argument was going in the wrong

direction for him, so he prudently changed the subject.

‘How is Edie, Jack? Is the little horse as great a favourite as ever. She has not ridden up here for a fortnight: how’s that? She has always been up on foot. I either forgot to ask after “Daisy,” or it has slipped me what she said about her.’

‘The blacksmith got a nail too near the quick the last time she was shod, and she limped; so Luke must needs have her ridden on grass only till the foot gets well. Of course Edie quite agreed to what he said, and consequently she has only ridden round the fields with me lately. I believe the invalid is going on so well she will be on the roads again shortly. Then Edie will bring her up to show to you. She will be very anxious to learn your opinion as to whether you think the prick will do any permanent harm, or not.’

‘She is a kindly-hearted creature, and sets great store by her old uncle’s opinion. More than you do, you self-willed young

scamp!’ It would seem that disregard of the opinions of their seniors has been a characteristic of young blood from times immemorial. Each age regrets the past when speaking of youthful obedience to their elders, or the want of it: so the Squire continued: ‘I don’t know what we are coming to. It is not that the young are to obey their elders; but, that the elders have to be guided in counsel by their juniors.’

‘Oh no, uncle, not that quite; but as Canon Wordsworth is so fond of insisting at our Board meetings—“The young to pull, and the old to guide; that is the true division of labour.” Don’t you think he is right?’

‘Humph! I don’t know. Take care the young ones do not pull the elders’ arms off in their anxiety to get on. The Canon knows human nature, and how to manage the youthful element; just keeps things going capitally. I really don’t know where you could find such another chairman.’

‘We would rather not have to try; at least just at present. I must be going.’

John Wharton left Gaythorne Hall, and instead of going in the direction of Fowrass Grange turned to Brigstone, and halted at the shop of ‘James Woodcock, Master Shoemaker’: knocking at the door, he then lifted the latch, and bowing his head, for the doorway was low, he disappeared.

‘Busy, Jim?’ was the question asked in a cheery tone. John Wharton had gone to Jim Woodcock’s ever since a boy. Some times for a ‘wax-end’ (the tapering end of the shoemaker’s threads, in great demand with boys, chiefly for the bristles with which they are tipped); or a bit of shoemaker’s wax for his silk for fishing purposes; or, with it, a hint about the proper fly for the season, and how to dress it. Mrs. Wharton had discouraged his visits as much as possible: not that she had any objection to Jim himself, but because the shoemaker’s shop was a sort of village lounge, where idle fellows dropped in when

they had no money to spend at the Black Swan, or the Stanhope Arms. But Jim, knowing her views on the subject, always attended to Master Wharton, and got him off when any undesirable characters were in without delay; conduct which Mrs. Wharton appreciated. If the coast was clear, then he dusted a seat with his leather apron; and, with a significant look, indicated to his journeyman and apprentice the necessity for a prudent tongue and their best behaviour.

‘Bless me, Mr. Wharton. Is that you? Why you’re quite a stranger,’ said Jim, heartily. ‘Will ye tek’ a seat, or ye’ll stand?’

‘I think I’ll stand, Jim, if you don’t object? And then I shall see if the shop is altered: I think it is much the same.’ So saying he cast his eye around the familiar sight. There were the sides of brown sole-leather, and the bit of ‘Settle blue-bend,’ prized beyond all other leather for durability; and a pile of upper leather:

with one hide devoted to thongs, which old Jim cut so neatly. There were the balls of cotton for the threads; a bucket of water in which the spare pieces of wax floated, safe from mischief; and, by the window, the bundle of bristles. There was the old lapstone on which Jim taught the apprentice to beat the soles so conscientiously; the clams for closing the uppers; the well-worn seats, with the little square divisions for tacks, sparrables (the nails driven into the soles); the wax; while the multifarious tools lay over the rest of the settle. He took them all in at a glance, with the background of lasts hanging against the wall. All was as of yore; especially the peculiar smell of a shoemaker's shop.

‘I don’t see any change, except in the faces, Jim. They’re new.’

‘I’m glad the pleace isn’t changed. Have you bin fishing much this year, sir? Now, my lad, get on wi’ th’ thread. No idling allowed here!’ This was addressed to the apprentice, who was slowly progressing

round an old shoe, to which he was attaching a new sole: awl in one hand and a bristle-pointed thread in each. 'There's no excuse for your hands not goin' if there is some one i' th' shop.'

The boy blushed, and applied himself to his work with great determination; his temporary arrest of labour being rather due to amazement at the appearance of the visitor, so unlike their usual visitors, than to any inherent laziness.

'He's a good lad, an' a capital worker upo' th' whole. I must say that for him;' continued his master, too penetrated with a sense of fairness to allow Mr. Wharton to carry away a wrong impression about the boy. 'Do you remember him, sir? He was th' lad I got from the Board at Wybrow.'

'Oh yes, I remember him well. I am glad you give him a good character. We are always glad to hear how our apprentices get on.' The boy applied himself to work with an assiduity which told that he was

resolved not to be the subject of conversation, if possible. 'You will set him a good example, Jim, I know. And not be too hard on him.'

'He's a good lad an' comes o' decent people, if he is a parish apprentice: and I mun' do my duty by 'im. Ould Jim's no respecter of persons,—they say, that wish to hav' a fling at him.'

'Those who object to your views as a reformer.'

'That's about it, sir. And they're likely to keep on saying it. I'm a people's man. And they say this stir i' th' "London Working Men's Association" will lead to something. Lovett's got Mr. Roebuck to tak' an interest i' th' subject, an' Colonel Perronet Thompson, an' Wakley. They're good men; but I can't say I care about Dan O'Connell.'

'Then you don't fancy "the repealer"?''

'I can't say I do. I don't trust him. He's a man that strikes me as always lookin' to his own hand: to see how he

can better himself : two for mysel' and one for my neighbour. But of course they couldn't well do otherwise. They've long kept th' public attention awake, and th' petition's been signed by three thousand persons. Th' House can't but notice it.'

'What do you think of their programme?'

'I think th' principle's right enough. But I'm not so sure that they'll mak' anything out. I should like to think otherwise ; an' I'm right glad they're going to mak' a trial. I've no opinion o' th' reform of the House of Lords being listened to. They'd better let that hare sit, and do their best to try and get th' House o' Commons to entertain th' matter o' th' Charter. You know, sir, as well as I do, that the people, that is the working class, hev' nivver bin satisfied about the Reform Bill. They helped th' middle classes to th' franchise, expectin' naturally, that when th' middle-class got a voice,—an' what's mair, a vote, they'd bear them i' mind ; and help them i' turn. But reform stopped where it was left in '32, and th'

working class feel as if they'd bin' deceived like ; and as if faith hadn't been kept wi' them.'

'I don't think they are wrong about that. But many of the Whigs think the franchise has gone low enough for the present ; and are not at all inclined to take up the question of further reform. They say they are doing good work ; and it cannot be denied they are ; and that they cannot abandon practical work, which all but the ultra Tories admit to be good, for chimerical work that they can't see the end of. The Tories and these lukewarm Whigs are too many for Lord Durham's men.'

'Aye ; that's only owre true. Having got what they want, they care nothing about th' people. When they wanted th' franchise, they could ask th' people to come to th' hustings, and hold up their hands, and shout ; with a riot now and again, or a stack or two i' flames, just to keep th' warld i' mind they didn't like the Corn Laws. That was all right then when it suited

them ; but it's all wrong now when they're satisfied.'

Jim spoke with the bitterness which all his class felt at the manner in which they had been treated in the matter. They had been utilized, and then cast aside. It had been a bitter experience to many of the earnest reformers.

'I am afraid there is too much truth in what you say, Jim. The people feel that they have not been fairly, let alone well-treated, in this matter. The Whigs have not kept their promises, except such as it suited them to keep. They have carried some very important measures ; such as the Parliament, as constituted before the Reform, would never have attempted.'

'That's what makes it so hard to bide. The Tories reckoned that if th' Reform Bill passed, th' end o' all things was at hand ; that th' bonds o' society would be unloosed, and that all 'ud be anarchy. Instid o' that we've seen seek mighty deeds dune as we nivver saw afore. There's th' new Poor

Law ; and th' slave abolition ; and th' Education vote ; and th' newspaper stamp, and th' duty off paper ; th' masses are to hav' information ; and Lord Ashley askin' about th' "white slave" at home. There was Corporation reform ; and th' doing away wi' th' press-gang. It's a grand roll o' deeds ; but ane can see th' energy's wearing out o' th' Whigs ; half of 'em are getting tired, and wantin' to rest. And th' people cry, "See th' results o' Reform ! Let us hav' mair Reform, and we'll hav' still greater results !" Surely they've reason upo' their side i' that ? If all th' forecasts of evil indulged in by th' Tories hav' remained unrealized, what right hav' they to keep on saying that all manner of evil will happen if th' franchise's lowered any further ? It's all a pack o' lies ! That's my opinion, sir.'

'The argument that any further lowering of the franchise will be followed by mob-law, —by the rule of numbers, and that the many unwise will rule the few wise, and destruction lie close ahead of us, is quite *à priori*

argument; which is not borne out by our experience of Reform, and is certainly negatived by the experience of Switzerland and the United States of America.'

'They know that as well as we do; but they'll neither read the past, nor look around them. Th' many unwise rule the few wise!—aye, and how have the few wise ruled us? Over a million of us working men hav' perished i' the bloody wars they've waged since th' last century began. And how much money hav' these wars cost? Not less than three thousand millions o' money. That is what class legislation has done for us. Just think what that auld fule George th' Third cost us wi' his war wi' France. Because France threw off those Bourbons—an' sarved them reet too—and would be ruled her own way, "we must have a bloody war with France; a long and bloody war," said Burke i' th' House o' Commons. To be sure his brain was givin' way, an' he was not th' man he once was. But to think that because France was tired o' they

Bourbons, that nivver learned ought nor forgot ought, we mun' ga t' war wi' her. What did that cost th' country, d'ye think? I think th' many unwise could do quite as sensibly as th' few wise hav' done, i' some o' their "class legislation."

John Wharton knew that 'the black record of class legislation,' the cost of our wars waged for dynastic purposes, in men and money, were stock arguments with the reformers before and after the Reform Bill; and that no satisfactory answers ever had been made to the charge. So he kept silence, and did not break in on the thread of the old reformer's thoughts; but as he took in the effect he could not help being somewhat amused. The journeyman was putting the last touch to the soles of a pair of shoes, but was arrested by the harangue; there he sat with the little candle burning with which he heated his iron to smooth the black rim of the soles, burning but only wasting; his tool in his hand, but no use made of it. The apprentice was industri-

ously using his awl, then fumbling his bristles through the hole and drawing the threads taut with an unsteady hand and unpractised arm ; giving himself to his work with *abandon*, after having been the subject of conversation and attention. Alone—he had no interest in the burning words of the speaker.

‘Aye, th’ unwise many hav’ a score again’ th’ wise few, for the auld days. But it’s nought to what they think about th’ Corn Laws. There’s a bit o’ class legislation, if ye like ! . There’s no denying that ! That th’ poor man’s bread has to be taxed that th’ landlord wi’ his mortgaged acres can get his rent ! Do ye think that one o’ God’s laws ? Nay indeed ; it’s th’ wickedest law man ivver invented. That th’ land-owners may live i’ plenty the poor man’s bairn can’t get enough o’ bread. I’ve watched th’ effects o’ th’ taxed bread-laws ; the childer’ getting whiter and shorter ; less bone to fill out wi’ th’ flesh they nivver get ; a punier race altogether than their

fathers an' grandfathers. Especially i' th towns you see th' childer' growing up into weedy men and lasses. Th' young fellows ye'll see now are nothin' like th' fine straight old chaps that ye see here and there, the men that fought Bonny. I've watched th' results of that divilish law, an' see them i' th' faces of th' growin' generation. Just luik at th' lad there: d'ye think he'll ivver get to six foot?—yet his father stood six feet in his stockings.'

The allusion to him seemed to strike the boy as reflecting upon him in some way, and his face flushed; while he fumbled more than usual with his awl, and seemed ready to burst into tears. His kindly-hearted old master did not observe this, else he would have had his word of explanation and approval, to put the boy's mind at ease. Not noticing the effect of the allusion, he pursued his line of thought.

'They'll find their reward, sir, when they see and realize what they've done. They've cut down th' bone and th' sinew of th'

country wi' their class legislation, and the bread-tax. D'ye think a law like that would ivver hav' been passed if th' people that eat th' bread had had a voice i' th' law-makin'? Not it. The poor know they've been sacrificed to th' interests o' th' great. Times are good, an' wages are good, an' th' harvests hav' been good; an' for a year or two there's been no want to goad th' people to madness. But just let times tak' a change, an' you'll see what 'll happen. Th' red cock 'll crow again, ye 'll see. I had a man wi' me a year or two ago that was working i' th' west when th' Bristol riots brak' out. He said it was na uncommon thing to luik out of a neet, and see a stack blazing: that was nothing thought of. The folk that had to eat th' taxed loaf burnt a stack when they wer' hungry. Hungry folk are not reasonable folk; and th' proverb says, "Oppression will mak' a wise man mad." And an empty stomach is a strang argument; and an indifferent heart maks th' empty stomach a' th' worse to bear.

The let-well-alone party i' th' Hoose will perhaps doubt their wisdom i' refusing to alter th' Corn Laws if bad times come, an' th' red cock begins to crow again. What was that cost th' Bourbons their heads i' th' French Revolution? It wasn't so much th' rule o' th' Bourbons, tho' God knows that was bad enough. It was that speech o' Queen Marie Antoinette, when they telled her th' poor o' Paris were famishing for want o' bread, "Then let them eat legs o' mutton." Legs o' mutton!—that might be a come-down for a queen; but legs o' mutton were out o' th' reach o' folks that couldn't get enough o' bread to fill their stomachs wi'. The Charter'll be a grand thing. Th' barons wrested a charter fra' King John; now th' people'll wrest a new charter fra' th' legislative order,—th' great folk that rule us, an' mak' th' laws for us. When we've our own Parliament, then th' laws'll be just, and proportioned to th' wants o' th' nation. Not a patch here, and a bit o' justice there; but broad comprehensive

laws sic as we hav' had a few since th' reformed Parliament gat to wark. Let us hav' th' Charter, and then th' bread-laws 'll soon be abolished ; an' a few mair things beside. There's a many need it.'

The old man pulled up at last, seeming to recollect himself.

'You have the heart of the old reformer in you yet, Jim. Peterloo has not been forgotten. And you really do think that the Charter would be desirable? Is there not some real fear that if the franchise was extended there would be some danger of ignorance getting the upper hand sometimes? Is there not something in that argument?'

'Yes ; there is something ! It is a refuge for those who are determined to let things remain as they are. Th' rough, ignorant fellows cannot rule th' rest o' society. There's not enough of them ! Here and there they might cast an election ; but that would have no real influence. They nivver could do anything unless their demand had

th' country at its back. There's no real danger, sir, fra them. The ignorant folk are not so proud o' their ignorance, as to want to stan' again' their betters. Not they ! They'll want to go wi' other folk, ye 'll see. Unless, as I said, hunger comes to upset them. Th' empty stomach argument will touch th' poorer end, no doubt ; but then who 'll be to blame for that ? Why th' men that made th' Corn laws, and th' men that uphold them. But the Charter's right, so far as it goes. They 'll hav' to agitate and mak' a row over th' feace o' th' land, afore any notice 'll be taken o' them. But if they stick to what is legal they 'll win notice. "Hold fast by th' laws," that was auld Major Cartwright's advice i' th' auld days afore Peterloo ; an' it was sound advice too. Now, sir, you're a sensible man, that I know o' my own experience ; an' a far-larned man by what I hear ; do you think now'—and here Jim dropped his vernacular in order to give emphasis to what he said—' As a reasoning

man, do you think that change will come from those that are satisfied ; or do you think the dissatisfied will have to win over the satisfied to their way of thinking ? What is your opinion on that subject ? ”

‘ Put in that way, Jim, of course I agree with you : the satisfied will not move until the dissatisfied have put them into action. The principle must be admitted ; but how about the practice ;—the getting it worked out ? ’

‘ Aye, sir ; that’s the rub ! But if those that can think won’t help those that can not ; what will be th’ result, d’ye think ? Those that hav’ th’ cause o’ th’ people at heart must tak’ th’ lead. There’s no other way for it, that I can see.’

‘ It is a matter one can not shirk, or thrust from one ; one must be for it, or against it. I am a Benthamite—the happiness of the greatest number is the true aim.’

‘ You’ll have no difficulty, sir, in deciding i’ that case. You must be a Chartist !’

‘ It would seem so !’ and John Wharton left the master shoemaker, and went away in deep thought.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLOUD GATHERS.

WHILE John Wharton was taking a practical interest in the condition of the people, and working hard as a guardian, his sister shared his interests and imbibed his enthusiasm.

‘Am I powerless to help in the work? Is there no way in which I could make myself useful? Women seem restricted to domestic work. Are there no other spheres for her? Is she simply to look on?’ said Miss Wharton one evening, after a long talk with her brother on the state of the people.

‘I do not know, I am sure; certainly not in the way in which I am engaged. Perhaps Mr. Pryor could utilize you. Mere perfunctory district-visiting, because it is

right to be trying to do some good, or as a lady-like occupation admitting of the gratification of curiosity and a prying into the affairs of the poor, will never gain his approval. But if you seriously wish to do something and to help, I am sure you will find him most willing to aid you.'

Having thought the matter over until she was confident that she was in earnest, and not persuading herself she was in earnest and so deluding herself, Miss Wharton went one day to offer her services as a volunteer. The Rectory was a large, roomy edifice of imposing character, suggestive of a comfortable stipend, very neatly kept, and bearing evidence of attention and taste. The Rev. Henry Pryor was a large, heavy, yet not corpulent, man. That he was kind-hearted, industrious, and active has been shown; he was also thoroughly sincere, and full of the dignity of his office. Mrs. Pryor was middle-sized, energetic, kindly, and well-informed, a good housekeeper, and a well-read, intelligent companion to her husband.

Miss Wharton looked up to her, and consulted her in all difficulties ; except such as she brought before her uncle's housekeeper, Mrs. Allonby, which greatly flattered that functionary's vanity. One day she was rather surprised by Miss Wharton saying, 'I am come with a new want, Mrs. Pryor ; I am anxious to be doing something among the people ; I seem to be leading such an idle life.'

'My dear, how can you call yours an idle life ? Henry often says how you are always engaged in something or another ; that your hands are always full when he calls ; and I know how many comforters you knit for the poor.'

'That is true. But I want to be doing something more. What John tells me about the condition of the poor has impressed me : so I have come to offer my services to Mr. Pryor as a volunteer.'

'Then you must wait till he comes in. He is out at present, but will be in shortly. Can you stay with me ?'

‘I should certainly like to do so, if I am not in the way.’

‘Put your mind at rest on that head. I shall be glad to have your company. I should indeed be glad to see more of you ; but I could not say so when you were occupied with nursing your mother ; may I say so now ?’

‘It is very kind of you ; but really what with going over the farm with John, and riding out with him, and calling upon Uncle Edward, and attending to housekeeping, where I found I had much to learn, and learning to make butter with Mrs. Ellwood ; my time seemed quite taken up. And then John likes me to take an interest in what he is reading in an evening, and I feel interested in it, and the evenings slip away so quickly I seemed to have no spare time. But I feel I ought to be doing something more. I hope Mr. Pryor will not think I am going to be a meddlesome person in the parish.’

‘He will have to change his opinion considerably if he does. Have you read about

the young Queen,—how she received the deputation announcing her uncle's death? The King seems to have died rather unexpectedly, with his head on Queen Adelaide's shoulder. The young Queen was in bed, and had to dress hastily to receive the deputies. It was a trying scene for her.'

'It must have been; but she carried herself through it with much dignity.'

'So she did. One is naturally very desirous of knowing something about her. Her mother seems to have brought her up in great seclusion; and her father died in debt; they must have had to practise economy.'

'It gives one quite an interest in her to learn this. The coronation must also have taxed her self-command.'

'She seems to have behaved quite prettily, and to have won the hearts of all. Lord Melbourne and the Duke of Wellington are like parents to the fatherless girl. For that is what she is, though she is also Queen of England.'

‘Yes ; it is more than seems to have been expected of Lord Melbourne from what one has heard of him. The Duke, of course, is another sort of person altogether.’

‘And this action of paying her father’s debts as soon as she has the means, betokens a good disposition. It is a promising beginning.’

Just at this moment the Rector entered.

‘What is this about “a promising beginning,” Agnes ? How do you do, Miss Wharton,’ he said, cordially shaking hands with her.

‘We were talking about the Queen going to pay her father’s debts.’

‘And why should she not, like any other girl who has got the means at last to carry out her wishes ? Quite proper, Miss Wharton, eh ?’

‘But Miss Wharton also wants to make a beginning ; she is a young lady of merit, too, I think.’

‘Certainly. What is it, Miss Wharton ?’

She explained her errand with much diffidence and many apologies.

‘I may seem to have remained oblivious of what I now think my duty for a long time. But I have explained to Mrs. Pryor how it was I had many demands upon my time.’

‘I think I comprehend the circumstances, Miss Wharton. You need not take yourself to task. It is not yet the eleventh hour. And if it were, who am I to judge?’

‘It looks rather like it though, does it not?’

‘I can’t admit that. But with so engaging a volunteer, what can a parochial pastor do? Certainly he can not decline her services.’

After much consultation it was decided that Mrs. Pryor and Miss Wharton should make periodical visits to the poor.

‘You will not make it uncomfortable for them. The poor things have got used to me; and don’t mind my visits. They will feel rather afraid of you at first; especially you, Miss Wharton. The people here are

accustomed to look up to the Whartons as people immeasurably above them. Your uncle is held in great awe, as well as respect, I can assure you. And what does he say to this proposal of yours, Miss Wharton ?’

‘ Oh, he grumbled at first, and said the admixture of the Marston blood had curiously altered the Wharton character. The Whartons were distinctly patrician, he said ; but the Marstons are certainly plebeian in their instincts. He says it is rather hard upon a Tory Squire to have only one nephew and one niece, and both bitten with such Radical tendencies. He calls John a “Chartist,” because he holds the Charter would be an improvement on the present state of affairs.’

‘ It is not likely that he and your brother will take the same sides on that question. He is a worthy old gentleman, but he is certainly wedded to the past ; and the word Reform is very objectionable to him.’

‘ It is a source of perpetual wonder to

me that he has not wedded in the past,' commented Mrs. Pryor, who held strong views on prepositions. 'Such a fine handsome man, and always so courteous to the sex, too!'

'Yes; I cannot tell why Uncle Edward has remained a bachelor. He was very fond of mother, and my brother, and self.'

'I fancy that has had a great deal to do with it; he would not have you disinherited, even by children of his own.'

'My wife looks upon your uncle, Miss Wharton, as a sort of modern knight-errant in the romantic self-devotion with which she credits him.'

'I do not think I do anything of the kind, Henry. I think him a splendid specimen of the country gentleman. Canon Wordsworth with all his height and his appearance, never looks so thoroughbred as Mr. Wharton.'

'You see she is devoted to her idol. It is useless to attempt to influence the opinions of your sex in matters of that kind. So we will change the subject. You are my two

lady-curates, when do you propose to set to work. The summer is getting on, and the outlook of things is not very promising. We have had good harvests now for a few years. A change may be at hand. I should like you to commence before the bad weather, and, perhaps too, the bad times, come. It would be well to know something of your own observations about the poor before the time arrives, when your discrimination may be taxed.'

'Perhaps the female eye may possess some power of observation not given to the male eye. We may not need so long a time to estimate the women at least, as is necessary in the case of the lords of creation.'

Mrs. Pryor was full of the respect due to her husband, as head of the house and spiritual head of the parish; but a little playful banter escaped her at times.

'Then make a good use of the power, please. Now I have something to attend to, and will leave you ladies to lay down your plans.'

Accordingly they set to work to devise what time they could devote to the work; how they should cut out their visits so as to take in the different portions of the parish, and see each section in turn. At last this was satisfactorily arranged.

‘One thing remains, Miss Wharton, that must be considered, and carefully considered by us, and it is this: What are we going to do to help these poor people,—when we have decided that they are proper persons to be helped?’

‘I have been trying to think about it; but have come to no satisfactory conclusion.’

‘They will scarcely thank us if we have never anything more for them than words; yet at the same time we must not let them expect too much from us. A certain portion, I fear, will look at us from the standpoint of what they can get.’

‘I suppose they will. But we must use our eyes. Cleanliness, I think, would weigh with me.’

‘It is not a bad thing to start from. Yet

I fear in some of the houses there can be no cleanliness ; we must take some other test.'

'Do you mean to say there are people who do not care about cleanliness, or that it is impossible for them ?'

'I fear in some cases it is scarcely reasonable to expect much of it.'

'How shocking !'

'I am afraid we must make up our minds to see a great deal we would rather not see ; and be compelled to know much we would rather not know.'

'I have thought of that. But the knowledge can do us no harm. Can it ?'

'I think not. But there will be much to think about which will not be pleasant matter for thought.'

'I am prepared for that. Let us know the facts. Knowledge must precede action.'

'A very pretty axiom, Miss Wharton ; but the acquisition of the knowledge will involve much that, at times at least, we may wish we had never known. You are young, very young, you know.'

‘I suppose I am. But my mother always trained me to look at things as they are. Knowledge is always better than ignorance. There may be a healthy knowledge and an unhealthy ignorance, you would say. I thought all over well before I made up my mind.’

‘On this understanding, then, we will proceed. We are not going to pose as Ladies Bountiful. That is one satisfactory thought.’

And so they started on their visits, and were variously received. By some distantly, as if suspicious of their motives. By others cordially; in some cases so cordially as to raise the suspicions of the visitors. By all, whether distant or cordial, with respect.

One old crone confined to the house with the rheumatism was very glad to see them, and to be read to.

‘Eh, bless ye, ladies, I’m pleased to see ye. Mr. Pryor often reads to me, whenivver he has th’ toime; but he hasn’t over mich o’ that to spare for me. I’ve my share! But sit ye doan; don’t stan’ about i’ th’

floor.' Taking chairs as requested, one would read a chapter slowly, with careful enunciation, and with explanation where required. 'Eh, but it does me good to hear ye! Ye read soa different fro' th' other folk. I can understand ye. They ayther read too fast for me, or they stop to spell th' words, and then I loise th' sense of it.'

In another cottage they found a young woman whom Mrs. Pryor remembered some years before as a domestic servant.

'When I knew her first she was a smart girl, with a face always clean, her hair neat, with a clean apron; and see now, poor thing, her face is dirty, her tangled hair over her eyes, her apron all crumpled and dirty, and her whole appearance slovenly and neglected.' 'How is this, Annie?' she asked. 'You are not so neat as you used to be.'

'It's all very well, ma'am; when you've a good hahse (house) to live in yo can tak' some proide in it, and yer sen'. But leuk at this hut, wi' th' rain coming in hear and

thear. It's heart-breakkin'; ane nivver can be tidy. Gi' me anuther hahse, and I'll be another woman.'

The argument seemed on the face of it a very strong one.

They had not pursued their visits long before it seemed very clear that there were many families where the father was gone, leaving a young widow with a large family of little ones. In many such cases it was simply impossible for the widows to earn sufficient for their families. The death of the father meant parochial aid, and that again pauperism.

'It is very sad,' said Mrs. Pryor one day; 'Henry tells me this is the outcome of the early marriages engendered by the old Poor Law. A young fellow found it easy to get parochial relief when he had nothing except bare walls, and a wife and two or three children: there was no question about it. So he never tried to do any better. Henry says that in the evidence given before the Commission about the

working of the old law, one man said, "I had saved a little money, got a cow and a pig or two, and got my cottage fairly well-furnished. My master was obliged to discharge me; he had no more work for me. I couldn't find any work. I couldn't get work. I was 'an independent labourer,' and I could not take the wages of 'the chargeable labourer,' who got an allowance from the parish; I could not live on such wages. So all went: and when I was beggared of everything, then I got parish pay, and with it and the wages I earned I got on."'

'How very horrible! Why it seems that that was the very way to encourage pauperism. There was no inducement for a man to try to have a decent cottage and to save a little.'

"That was the effect of the old law. All these young widows were married under the old law; paupers they are, and paupers they must be till their children grow up.'

'I often hear John talk about the results

of the new Poor Laws. I hope they will do the work which is expected of them.'

'This early widowhood and pauperism is a sad thing. There is no chance of a widow with a family getting married again. No man will start to work for what they call hereabouts "a ready-made family."' '

'Well, one could hardly expect him. It is scarcely likely a man would. But it is very hard all the same for the widows.'

Then they came to a cottage where an old dame was looking after a number of very young children.

'Where have you got all these little ones from, Grannie?' asked Mrs. Pryor.

'Eh, ye may well ask me that. Their mothers are away i' th' hay-field, makin' a little brass for th' winter. They pay me a trifle to leuk after th' childer.'

'You have one or two asleep, I see. How good they are!' remarked Miss Wharton.

'Aye, the're good childer', these. The're varry quiet; they sleep most o' ther toime.

But I gi'e them a little drop when they wakes, an' then they goes off ageain.'

'What do you give them in the little drop?'

'Just a drop o' laudanum i' some gin. It sleeps them foin. They's vary good wi' it.'

'But don't a great many die with it?'

'I can't say as they does.'

'But the doctor tells a different tale. He says half the children hereabouts die before they are three years old.'

'I can't think as th' doctor's reet aboot hear. It may be true i' th' touns. I've heard it said about Sheffeld. But ye can't keep them quiet no uther way as I knows of. Leuk at that 'un liggin' i' th' corner. Fra th' moment he's awake the cry 's nivver out of his mouth till he's had a drop, and then he drops off in a minute.'

On looking carefully at the child they found its face in deep wrinkles, looking rather more like an old person's face reduced, than an infant's face.

‘She loises flesh, she does; sh’ll nut be long wi’ us, that ’un, I fear.’

It was clear the old woman looked upon gin and laudanum as part of the necessities of life; and a high infant mortality as part of the plan of Providence for keeping down the population.

‘Bless ye, they nivver misses ’em. As one gooes another comes. They’ve always as many as they can feed.’

‘What a Malthusian old wretch she is;’ said Mrs. Pryor, after they had turned away.

‘The cold-blooded old vampire! Getting a living by sucking the life-blood out of those unhappy infants.’

‘She does not see it in that light. She makes a trifle by looking after them while their mothers are helping their fathers in the fields. They are so accustomed to see children tended, and kept quiet by this, or some other like means, that they think nothing about it.’

‘She seemed a kind-hearted old body,

who would not be unkind to them. And she was very clean,—kept herself clean, and the children, as far as she could.

‘Old Hannah is held in great respect, I can assure you. She is in great demand hereabouts in hay-time and harvest; and is rather a character.’ Mrs. Pryor had accompanied her husband often enough to know the parish well. They saw much that was painful, much that they deplored, much that they would willingly blot out of their recollection, had that been possible.

Especially was this the case when they got to the edge of the parish lying close to the Satanstoe collieries. Bad as things were before, they found them worse there. The cottages were worse kept; there was more dirt about; the gardens, what there were of them, were untilled and overgrown with weeds. The same number of children were seen about, the same slatternly wenches, only more of them; many, too, without the wedding-ring of the married woman. The morals of the pitmen were

sadly loose; indeed they could scarcely be said to have any morals. What could be expected? Women and children worked in the pits at that time under the men—rough, reckless fellows, who gambled with life, and whose pleasures were of the lowest. Their highest pleasure was music, and many of them sang well. But beyond that it was drink—and worse. And what could be expected? A man would go to the work-houses far and near, and hire apprentices, lads who for seven years would never have a penny to call their own. Such a boy was a ‘butty,’ merely a slave of his master. He would treat his own children much the same. When the poor little fellows were mere children they were taken down into the pits, to keep the doors here and there; when they heard the little waggon coming they pulled open the door, and woe betide them if they were found asleep. Yet they had to sit all alone in the darkness without a light. The waggons were drawn by boys a little older, who had been door-

keepers themselves ; and who revenged the suffering they, as such, had undergone upon the poor little wretches at their mercy.

But the waggons were not always drawn by boys. It was given in evidence before a Royal Commission that women and girls worked in the coal-pits. With a chain around the waist, boys or girls upon all-fours drew the waggons along by chains which passed between their legs,—through ways more like a common sewer than anything else. Labour in the pits utterly brutalized the women who worked there. They had no sense of decency left ; and never washed their bodies, only their faces, necks, and ears. The clothes of boys and girls who were ‘drawers,’ as they were termed, wore the dirt off as they themselves were worn out. On Sundays the collier would turn out, if a buck, in white stockings, and very tall shirt-necks, stiffly starched, and even ruffles at times ; with his best clothes on ; his ‘posy jacket,’ as he called his best coat, from the ‘posy’ or

flower he was wont to wear in the button-hole. But underneath this finery he was utterly unwashed, and his skin was ingrained with coal-dust. Sights they saw here that neither maid nor mother should see. They might have said as Kingsley said in his 'Rough Rhymes on a Rough Matter,' at a later day :

'Our daughters with base-born babies
Have wandered away in their shame ;
If your misses had slept, Squire, where they did,
Your misses might do the same.'

But they went through it all dutifully ; bearing in mind that unto the pure in heart all is pure. Amidst these brutalized beings who had lost all but the semblance of womanhood, they went stoutly.

'Gie mah my coit, th' leddies ar' comin','
a rude collier would say, who had been all but nude ; so far as a thick covering of dried sweat and coal-dust permitted of the word 'nude' being applied. 'Ah'd geen owre leuking for 'en to-day. Let mah hev' my booits. I mun hev' them on when they come into th' hahse.'

All tried to put on their best appearance when the ladies were in the neighbourhood. In one house into which they entered they found a collier lying in bed, with an injury. He had had a quarrel with a mate in the pit, and had been hit by him with his pick. He had received an ugly wound, and the other man was in gaol for the assault. They saw a pick in the corner of the room ; and on asking why it was there, were told that it was the pick with which the injury had been inflicted, and that it was very carefully watched. If the pick rusted, the wound would canker ; in which case the man would die.

‘It is inconceivable,’ said Miss Wharton, when they had got outside the house, ‘that such a superstition should linger still in these days. Why, this takes one back to the middle ages ; or rather to the dark ages before them.’

‘It tells of the state of mind of the collier, poor fellow ; no wonder, with his range of mind, if his pleasures are coarse : of the earth, earthy !’

‘ We must not judge them too harshly.’

Such were the experiences Mrs. Pryor and Miss Wharton met in their visits about the parish of Brigstone. Often they found poverty which they were glad to relieve. Often, too, they found poverty where some counsel was as much required as any material help. Sometimes the poverty seemed wilful. But everywhere almost they saw evidence of lack of thrift,—the want of preparation for a rainy day. Each could intelligently follow the conversation when it ran on the poor, the state of the country, and the price of food. And as the harvest went on the weather worsened, and it became clear the price of corn must rise. Already the corn merchants were holding their stocks, and forcing up prices. It was becoming only too clear that a certain amount of ‘ clamming ’ was inevitable.

‘ We will have that ugly argument old Jim Woodcock dreads so, to deal with ere long, I fear—“ the empty stomach,”—and a terrible argument it is,’ John Wharton

would remark. 'The rough fellows who have had a sort of rude plenty for a year or two will begin to feel the pinch; and then they will raise an outcry for the old "outdoor relief," and perhaps riot. I am sorely afraid we shall soon see troublous times.'

Miss Wharton would listen with a feeling of impending evil. Her recent experiences had made these topics of enthralling interest to her. She was almost as absorbed in them as her brother himself. If her grasp of the subject was not so wide, her sympathy was even keener.

CHAPTER X.

A CHANGE OF FRONT.

No one can suppose that in a society so limited as the world of Brigstone, the new step taken by Mrs. Pryor and Miss Wharton passed unnoticed. It attracted the attention of all. The Rector, of course, approved of it. Squire Wharton said :

‘ My sister-in-law was a clever, well-informed, good woman ; but she brought up the children too much to think for themselves : because they think differently from their elders, it does not follow they are wiser. This admixture of blood is a queer thing : the Whartons were never given to these whimsies ; they left the Government to look after the people. This interest in the people only upsets them, I fear.

Still, it is not a matter in which I can interfere.'

The people took various views. One saw very little come out of it; the poor had got little. Another did not see why one family should have benefited, while another had been passed over; she would have distributed the charity differently. But as she did not practically interfere in the way of doing anything for those who, in her opinion, had been passed over, it is not necessary to set much store by her thoughts.

'Perhaps,' said another, 'since the ladies are beginning to look into things for thersens, we may get some better laws. There is a stir being made up in London about the Charter; and, I hear, against the Corn-Laws too; but it will never reach Brigstone, I fear. But the ladies' visiting may do something.'

A larger section were of the opinion that a number of the old people had got comfortable winter wraps, the work of Miss Wharton; and so had reason to be thankful.

It was a step which was a good deal canvassed among the better classes of society. Now, it is quite usual for ladies in the best social positions to visit the poor, even to the lowest neighbourhoods. Nothing is said of such action but approval. But at that time such action was novel; and novelty always brings upon itself much criticism; and, usually, among minds opposed to all change, a certain amount of condemnation. Even Canon Wordsworth thought it a questionable step. Meeting the Rector and John Wharton one day, before the Board met at Wybrow, he opened up the subject abruptly.

‘Well, gentlemen, how is all in the parish of Wybrow? What do the ladies say about the people? I am afraid they see much that they ought not to see.’

‘In what way?’ asked John Wharton.

‘Sights and scenes a lady does not care to look upon; much that they must revolt at.’

‘And if they do,’ said the Rector, firmly,

‘shall they go on in ignorance that it exists, not knowing and not caring; or if it is there, and they see it, and if they think it should not be, should they not say so? Which of the two is to be preferred? If there exists what they ought not to see, should we shut our eyes to the facts?—or ought we to recognize its existence and do away with it? Surely the whole of our aim in being here is to devise the best plans for dealing with poverty and wretchedness.’ The Canon saw that there was little to be gained by pursuing the main line of inquiry, so he deftly turned it aside.

‘Of course we know and recognize that knowledge must guide us in action; and perhaps ladies see some things more clearly than we men do. But this is a novel step. Mrs. Pryor is married, and, as the clergyman’s wife, might be expected to see for herself; but Miss Wharton is young—much younger, and single too.’ The old Canon was an energetic man of the world as well

as an ecclesiastic, and recognized social laws and regulations.

‘Of course if much exists that is objectionable, they cannot well avoid seeing it. But, after all, is seeing it worse than hearing of it, or reading about it? The impression made is more vivid certainly,’ said John Wharton. ‘I do not think my sister will be injured by what she sees.’

‘I see you, neither of you! see much objection to it. And, after all, you must be the judges on the matter. I only reflected what I hear said around me. Will we have much business to transact to-day, do you think?’ The practical Canon felt that the business was none of his particularly. From the remarks both gentlemen learned that district-visiting by ladies was an innovation of which the local Mrs. Grundy did not much approve; and at which she was disposed to shake her head.

At Orton Hall the subject was gravely debated. Stephen Oldfield knew all that went on amongst local social respecta-

bilities; while, of course, Miss Oldfield heard what was said by the ladies of their large visiting circle. As said before, it was generally recognized that 'there was something' between Stephen Oldfield and Miss Wharton; and consequently several well-intentioned ladies took the opportunity of informing Miss Oldfield of what was said, and thought about the action of one with whom they were so closely linked.

'Miss Wharton is very young, you see, for such a step. And unmarried too! Not even engaged! It would be well for her to observe conventional laws a little more, I think;' said one old lady, wise in the wisdom of this world.

'It is scarcely becoming; though she never goes alone, I hear, and only with Mrs. Pryor. I think it well for ladies to let these matters alone. It is well enough to be charitable; and to give orders to the cook to supply sundry articles to those of the poor of whom one has certain knowledge from the clergyman, or the doctor.

But not to go any further.' Certainly ; she was right if it was merely the duty of the rich to give to the poor out of their superabundance. But if human sympathy, and the great Christian principle of the strong helping the weak, had to extend no further than this, 'love' and 'charity' have very restricted meanings ; and the Levite who crossed over to the other side could not exactly be called a bad neighbour, though scarcely helpful. But the example of Christ, and his association with publicans and sinners, tell us that something more is involved in the Christian brotherhood. Else, why should the rich man have been condemned, for Lazarus was 'fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table' ; and yet this was as much as the lady was proposing should be done ; and no more ! But perhaps the old lady did not read her Bible very attentively.

'How does your brother like Miss Wharton going about in this way, Maria ?' asked another old dame, whose feelings

were none of the finest ; who had a strong judgment, little guided by tact. This placed Miss Oldfield most awkwardly. She knew very well that ‘ the something ’ was nothing very definite, and that her brother was not in a position to remonstrate ; though very possibly the old lady imagined he was.

‘ He thinks it is very good of her to see about the poor for herself. It shows great self-denial, I am sure.’

‘ It shows great “ self-will,” my dear, that is my opinion ; and if she belonged to me, or mine I would very soon let her know what I thought about it. I wonder her uncle does not put his foot down upon such goings - on. They don’t belong to the Whartons, I am sure. I always thought their mother, Mrs. Wharton that was, had a great deal of self-satisfaction about her. They take at her clearly. I hear John Wharton is in favour of the Charter ; which means the division of property, and mob law, and the reduction of the rich to

poverty, by what I hear. It is scarcely quite respectable, my dear.'

'They both certainly are inclined to think for themselves; whatever other people think about them:' was Miss Oldfield's answer.

The remarks made to Mr. Oldfield were conceived in the same spirit, if couched in more guarded speech. He began to grow very uncomfortable about the matter. One day he said to his sister:

'Maria, can you spare me a few minutes? I wish to consult you upon a matter of grave importance.'

'Certainly, Stephen; I am at your service. What is it you wish to talk about?'

'Well, Maria, my mind is much exercised about Miss Wharton; and what is said about her. Don't you think it is a great pity?'

'Which do you mean?—a pity she is going on as she is doing; or a pity that such remarks are being made?'

'Well, both.' Mr. Oldfield was not the person not to see a subject in all its bearings!

‘What should be done about it?’

‘How can we interfere in any way? There is no engagement betwixt you and her.’

‘No; that is it; if there were I could interfere. But as it is, we are only old friends and well-wishers.’

‘Certainly, we are those. Have you resolved to ask Miss Wharton for her hand?’

‘Maria, you speak of it in such formal terms.’ It was rather surprising to hear the little prim gentleman speaking so of ‘formal.’

‘How else am I to put it? Are you paying your addresses to her? Will that do?’

‘Of course I am. I should like to make Miss Wharton my wife. She will be acceptable to you as such, Maria?’

‘Most assuredly,’ she replied; kissing her brother—a rather unusual step for them, except the regular customary night and morning salute, to assure him of her feeling.

‘Then I think I will speak to John

Wharton on the subject, before asking the lady herself.'

'That is the first step, without doubt. And her uncle; what shall you do about him?'

'Oh, I shall speak to him too. But I have my own reasons for thinking he will raise no objections to my suit. I am not so sure about John Wharton.'

'Why not about him, Stephen? I am sure he is always most courteous.'

'Yes, he is; but at bottom he holds me a true-blue 'Tory, and he has no liking for me.'

'Men may differ about their views on politics, but that should not affect their friendship. Squire Wharton is a Tory; yet he and his nephew are on excellent terms. I do hope John Wharton will not stand in the way. I would take an early opportunity of speaking to him, however.'

After this family council, and the formal assurance that his sister approved of his offering his hand to Miss Wharton, Mr.

Oldfield set to work in earnest to bring his relations with that lady into some tangible, definite shape. He also arrived at the conclusion that he would call at Fowrass Grange some day, when he would be likely to find John Wharton alone. He had calculated that it would be well to gain his permission first ; after that to consult the Squire ; and then so armed, and on the vantage-ground of the sanction of her family, to seek the consent of the lady herself. It was a well-laid plan. It placed Edith Wharton in the difficulty of seeming to run counter to the wishes of her family, if she declined his attentions.

It might not be a very gallant way of approaching a lady ; not a chivalrous one certainly ; but Stephen Oldfield was not of a particularly chivalrous nature. It did, however, contain more promise of success than any other scheme he could devise. And, after all, he thought in his innermost heart, there is nothing so successful as success.

It was not long before he found the opportunity of calling upon John Wharton, and found him alone. This was no mere fortuitous matter : he had carefully informed himself of Miss Wharton's movements, and had good reasons for believing she would not be at Fowrass Grange at the time of his visit. Shown in to Mr. Wharton, the usual civilities and salutations were interchanged ; after which the suitor opened out his errand.

“ I am desirous of ascertaining your views upon a very important matter, Wharton.’

‘ I am all attention : proceed,’ was the reply, rather off-hand ; but then the little man's formality was so habitual that his remarks might have been the prelude to the question of whether out-door relief or the ‘ house ’ was to be offered to some particular applicant for parochial relief. The tone was rather disconcerting, considering the intention of the speaker ; but he proceeded :

‘ You have doubtless observed that my attentions to Miss Wharton have been somewhat marked. We have been old friends.

But a warmer feeling has sprung up in me ; which, without wishing to be chargeable with vanity, I venture to think is reciprocal betwixt your sister and myself.' John Wharton began to listen very attentively now. ' If I didn't feel an assurance that such was the case, I should scarcely have thought it proper to take the step I am now taking. In such belief, then, I now ask you formally if my suit for your sister's hand '—and heart, he would have added had he felt that in John Wharton he had a warm ally—' will be acceptable to you ; or not. You are her brother, and her natural guardian ; I must have the knowledge that my action will be agreeable to you before I can address her.'

John Wharton was not exactly taken by surprise by this request ; yet he was hardly prepared for it : thinking it still in the distance only, he had not given it the attention he had intended to give to it. Nevertheless, the whole circumstances were well known to him ; there was no sufficient

reason for declining to give a positive answer until he could think the matter over. Stephen Oldfield was not a man after his own heart; but he was in every way eligible.

‘I have no objection to offer; all must depend upon her own decision. She usually knows her own mind: and on a matter of this kind I think the lady herself must be the sole judge; if competent to judge for herself.’

‘Which Miss Wharton certainly is. Then I am to understand that you,—as her natural guardian,—have no objection to my seeking your sister’s hand?’

‘Quite so. She shall not be influenced by me in the matter at all. I will drop no hint even that you have consulted me on the subject.’

This was an attitude so definitely neutral, so entirely negative, that even a personage so habitually self-satisfied as Mr. Oldfield, did not get much encouragement therefrom. Still it was consent; there was no mistake

about that. He had got his foot down on the first rung of the ladder which reached up to Miss Wharton's hand.

‘I thank you. I think I would prefer you to say nothing.’

Now this was not untrue ; because he felt that if John Wharton did speak to his sister on the subject, it would not be warm advocacy of his suit. But at the same time, it was not exactly correct ; for he would have liked that Miss Wharton should know that he had obtained her brother's consent, when the momentous time of proposal came. But, failing advocacy, a neutral attitude was certainly the best thing for him.

‘I should be prepared with suitable settlements ; I should like you to understand that.’

‘I quite believe so ; but are these not matters of detail which it is rather premature to discuss at this stage ?’

This was rather cruel ; rather like a sharp frost on a tender shoot : but still it was fair

and proper ; though young love did wince under it.

‘ Certainly. I merely wished to intimate to you that I quite appreciate the value of Miss Wharton ; and would do what a gentleman should do to testify his appreciation. A practical evidence of his feelings ; you understand.’

‘ Quite so ; your habitual thoughtfulness is well-known, Oldfield. Had you not better see Uncle Edward before taking any positive step ? I think he would like it.’

‘ Most assuredly. I should not think of taking a step involving those belonging to him, without first consulting him. I shall wait upon him shortly.’

After he had taken his departure, John Wharton mused : ‘ He is anxious to be my brother-in-law. Not on my account, I fancy. However has Edie evoked the fire of love in the breast of that piece of formality ! It is testimony to the power of her charms, which cannot be gainsaid. I wonder how she will take it. I should not give much for his

chances ; at least the first time of asking. Once, twice, will not deter him. He is one of the most determined of mortals. I hope he won't pester the girl. I should not like the thought of that. Uncle Edward will receive him cordially. Well ; if he does not, the little man can hardly think the Wharton connection very anxious about the alliance. I am afraid I was not very enthusiastic. I must drop no hint to Edie. I wonder if she will be taken by surprise. I hardly think so. Women are said to have a very keen scent for any love-making. And certainly the little man has tried to throw some tenderness into his manner of late ; now I begin to think about the matter seriously. I wonder if he will make her happy. He is a steady-going fellow ; nothing fast about him. If anything, rather staid ; but she will not object to that. But he is a true-blue Tory : that is rather against him. I suppose they will learn to compromise, as all married people do, I am told.' Here John Wharton revealed the fact that he still walked about in

the nightly darkness of bachelor ignorance ; nor did the soliloquy indicate the dawn of any coming matrimony. His wonders were natural under the circumstances ; and he felt a most genuine, unaffected interest in the question of his sister's future. ' He has got my consent : even if not very cordially given. And Uncle Edward's is certain. He will make the most of these facts, if he experiences any difficulty. I wonder if she will be quick enough to see the stealthy approach ? Women's wits are keen. I hope she will not allow him to make too much of our consent. After all, I should not be grieved if she said him, No. And yet the match is a proper one in every respect.'

So much for John Wharton.

When Stephen Oldfield called upon Squire Wharton he found him in his sitting-room with its dark oak panelling, smoking a cigar, and listening to some remarks from Mrs. Allonby. He at once observed the Squire was in an excellent good humour. So far, so good, he thought. Mrs. Allonby seemed

to take in the errand intuitively ; and after answering his rather marked inquiries after her health, found that there was something requiring her immediate attention in the domestic quarter of Gaythorne Hall. After the usual civilities had been interchanged, Mr. Oldfield proceeded :

‘ I have come to see you in a new character, Mr. Wharton. I am come as a suitor for your niece’s hand. I dare say you have long observed that my attentions to her were rather more marked than are those of mere neighbourly friendliness. I have asked her brother’s consent, and now I am come to ask yours.’

‘ And what did Jack say ? ’ asked the Squire eagerly.

‘ He has given me his consent.’

‘ Has he, by Jove ! I was not so sure about him. You have mine, my boy. I have long looked on the match as likely to come off ; though, of course, I could neither make ; nor meddle. I wish you all success.’

‘It is very good of you to say so, I am sure, sir.’

Mr. Oldfield never forgot what was respectful to his elders; and the Squire’s warmth was a contrast to his nephew’s chilly coldness. He began to think that Miss Wharton was his. He had a staunch ally in her uncle, that was clear.

‘I am deuced glad things have come to this point, Oldfield. You see Jack holds strong views; even to the advocacy of the Charter. Of course I do not approve of them; and so I let him know. But that does not affect him much. And of course Edith takes her opinions from him; and is a high-spirited, strong-willed girl—though for all that an excellent girl; as I know well. And I have always had a fear that she might be thrown in the way of some of his reforming acquaintances, and become entangled with some one of whom I cannot approve. It will put my mind at rest to know that all is settled; and that she is in the hands of some one I can trust.’

‘I trust I shall prove worthy of your good opinion of me. I can assure you, Miss Wharton’s many good qualities are not lost upon me. As to her high spirit, I think I like her the better for it.’

‘Possibly so ; though if it prompts her to say “no” the first time you ask her, it may not seem so admirable. But you are not the man who would be deterred from asking a lady a second time ; if she happened not exactly to know her mind at the first asking.’ Mr. Oldfield winced here ; he was by no means deficient in perseverance, indeed possessed a great deal of that quality ; but this particular exercise of it involved his vanity. He was not the man to take ‘No’ from a lady with a good grace. His mind was rapidly surveying the position, when the Squire went on, ‘Faint heart never won fair lady,’ I fear. And I don’t think my niece will be any exception to the rule. If she did not say yes at first, I think, when she came to think it over, she would change her mind. She has got plenty of good

sense as well as a high spirit, has Edie. And common sense and high-spiritedness are not always seen together in girls; at least in my experience.'

This turn of the conversation favoured the suitor,—to use the language of greyhound coursing; and gave him an opportunity for a complimentary remark.

'Miss Wharton's good sense has always impressed me. She has many attractions.'

'Quite right; and if all goes well she will have those canal shares altogether. If you make a match of it, I will give them up. I know they are safe with you.' Could any uncle be more gracious to the suitor who seeks the hand of his niece? Mr. Oldfield showed his gratefulness with dignity; and all was pleasant and agreeable.

The Squire quickly after this, assuming the topic to have been exhausted, turned to other matters.

'I tell you what it is, Oldfield, we landed proprietors must stick well together, and keep a good front to the enemy. There

must be no division in our ranks, and no faint-heartedness. We seem likely to see some troublous times. The bad harvest has sent up the price of wheat, and bread is dear. If it were not for the Corn Laws, I do not see how the farmers could pay their rent. And the league forming against the Corn Laws will try to make a stir. Confound those manufacturing fellows, they only want to get cheap bread in order to pull down wages. Cutting thongs out of other people's hides. It is clear enough what they are after.'

'I think there can be no question about that, Mr. Wharton.'

'I should think not. They will agitate and upset people's minds, now when the bad harvests are telling. And that abomination "the Charter" is laying hold of all those who do not possess the franchise. We land-owners will have to stand by each other in the coming trials. Fortunately the Duke is well. I have no faith in Lord Melbourne, if a revolutionary epoch set in. But the Duke is to be relied on.'

‘The Duke possesses the entire confidence of the country; and he has all an old soldier’s dislike of lawlessness and turbulence.’

‘That he has; and a soldier likes order and discipline. If we should have any rioting, such as there was in the winter of 1831-32, when excitement and dear bread were present together, it will be well to have a man of decision at the head of affairs. It will set an example to the country.’

‘We are not far from Sheffield, which has always been a town prone to excitement and disaster, and at times to violence.’

‘That old rhyming steel-merchant, Ebenezer Elliott, does them a lot of harm, with his rhymes and his songs. I wish we could get him into gaol, like Lovett, out of the way of further mischief. What has he to do with the nation, setting class against class, and putting words into the mouths of the dissatisfied, that they would never find for themselves? Such men do far more mischief than the torchlight processions,

which without their songs would do very little harm. But they listen to wild harangues, and then they sing their songs, till their evils seem twice as big as they really are ; and they fan themselves to fury.'

'That is quite true, sir.'

'I wish we had a few more of their leaders laid by the heels out of the way. We must keep them in check at the sessions. I know I can count on your loyal coöperation. We sit on the bench together. I hope soon to see us in closer relationship. But be careful ; young fillies are apt to be skittish. If girls don't know their minds, they are sure to be awkward. But you can always ask them again. Good-bye.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHARTER.

WHAT was this Charter which seemed to be so disturbing at this time ?

It was an organized attempt at parliamentary reform ; an attempt to give the people a greater voice in the law-making of the country. From the time of the Plantagenet Kings it had become customary for the King to summon advisers from various parts of his dominions : indeed the Parliaments which Edward I. 'gathered at the close of his reign are absolutely identical with those which still sit at St. Stephen's ('History of the English People,' J. R. Green). And so matters had remained. The King's writs called members from places which, once populous and of

repute, had in many instances died down, till Old Sarum had no longer an inhabitant or a house left, any more than Persepolis; yet it still was represented in Parliament. Ludgershall in Wiltshire had one owner and one member; the owner elected himself. Another place had seven electors; and so on, and so on, till more than half the House of Commons consisted of the nominees of lords and squires. These effete constituencies had become known as 'rotten boroughs.' In one of the struggles against the iniquitous ministries of the early years of George III., Lord Chatham advocated a scheme of parliamentary reform. On January 22nd, 1770, he said in the House of Lords, 'The boroughs of this country have properly enough been called the "rotten parts" of the Constitution'; and the Saxon adjective remained linked to the boroughs till 1832. Why did it take more than half a century to do away with such obvious abuse? A retrospect may tell us!

Chatham's scheme was to infuse new blood into Parliament by adding one more to the members of each county. In 1780 the electors of Westminster appointed a Committee to consider the matter of the election of members of Parliament. Charles James Fox, the great Whig leader, was one of the chairmen of this committee. They recommended the following programme :

1. ANNUAL PARLIAMENTS.
2. UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE.
3. EQUAL VOTING DISTRICTS.
4. NO PROPERTY QUALIFICATION.
5. VOTING BY BALLOT.
6. PAYMENT OF MEMBERS.

In the same year the Duke of Richmond introduced a Bill into the House of Lords in favour of *Annual Parliaments*, and giving a vote to *every man not contaminated by crime, nor incapacitated by want of reason*. Three years later Colonel Sharman wrote his famous letter in which he declared, 'The subject of parliamentary reform is that which, above all others, most deserves the attention of the public,' and

advocated the before-named changes. But the French Revolution arrested all reform. Many Englishmen espoused the cause of the French Revolutionists; the alarm spread. Patriotism bore down reform, and nothing was done. But reform was not killed outright. In 1792, the 'Society of the Friends of the People' was established by Charles Grey, Esq.; who forty years afterwards was the Earl Grey of the Reformed Parliament.

In 1795 the Society published a declaration that there should be 'no condition of life in which the right of voting might not be acquired by labour, by industry, by talents.' But the deadly struggle with Napoleon kept England too engaged for any question of internal reform. So low indeed had reform sunk that in 1816 Lord (then Mr.) Brougham said it was 'opposed by some, deserted by others, and espoused by persons whose conduct excited no small degree of disgust out of doors.' But a little later on the people took it up,

especially in the North; and the writings of William Cobbett were largely read in South Lancashire and the North Midlands. 'Cobbett's Weekly Political Register' was a single sheet of octavo, and cost twelve-pence-halfpenny, which placed it out of the reach of the poor. At the end of 1815 he brought out 'The Twopenny Register,' and swiftly every cottager knew his name. 'Hampden' Clubs sprang up everywhere, while the Sunday schools were means of teaching men to read, and so becoming readers and speakers. Poetry became common, which, if rude, still appealed to the heart. The programme of that time was as follows: 'All males over eighteen years of age who paid taxes were to have a vote; Annual Parliaments; every 20,000 of the people to have a member; no placeman or pensioner to sit in Parliament.' All who have read that very interesting little book, 'Passages from the Life of a Radical,' by Samuel Bamford, know how the people were taken up with the question of reform.

A large meeting in Manchester, on August 16th, 1819, was suddenly attacked by the Yeomanry, and some scores were wounded and a number killed. Bamford suffered imprisonment in Lincoln gaol for his part in the affair, as the virtual leader of the Middleton men; while the grand jury threw out the bill against the men who caused 'the Peterloo massacre'; while the Prince Regent thanked them for their promptitude. The Six Acts were passed, and the consequence of all this was—'It filled the working class with a fierce contempt and hatred of every one wearing a decent coat.' Class hatred became rife, and the interests of the people and their rulers clashed till the clang went throughout the land. The Prince Regent had a disgraceful contention with his wife; and the latter found her supporters amidst the ranks of the reformers, and her famous advocates in Denman and Brougham,—the latter the very cynosure of the Reform party. Yet when the

Reform Bill did ultimately pass what was the result? As regards the counties, the franchise was restricted to the old forty-shilling freeholder of the days of the Edwards and the Henrys, and the fifty-pound a year tenant. The result was not very satisfactory: it may be put in the words of the clerk in the village in which the writer was reared. He often used to point to the absurdity of the franchise so: "Look round the village: there is the curate, the doctor, and the schoolmaster, next to the vicar the best educated men in the village, and not one of them a vote; while the parish clerk, because he has an old tumble-down cottage and garden of his own, has a vote.'

This state of affairs was obviously absurd, and reformers still agitated for reform. They had learned a lesson which they were not likely to forget. In the Catholic Emancipation, in the Reform Bill itself, they had seen that their rulers had yielded not to the justice of a demand,

but to the vigour with which the demand was made. If there was agitation enough, and force enough to render resistance to the law possible,—and the threat of the latter was made,—they yielded. A threat of resort to violence alone could secure justice. That was conceded to clamour which was never allowed to mere right.

In the opening of the first Parliament of the Queen, an amendment to the Address to the Crown was made by a radical member, to the effect that the Ballot and shorter Parliaments were desirable. It received a very limited support. Lord John Russell, the then Home Secretary, announced that it was not the intention of the Government to deal any further with reform ; a speech, which procured for him the nickname of ‘Finality John.’ He said to do so was to commit a breach of faith with those who allowed the Bill to be carried on the understanding that the reform question should rest where it was put in 1832. The great mass of reformers regarded this as a

distinct breach of faith with them. A number of the radical members, including Mr. Roebuck and the famous Irish repealer, Dan O'Connell, met the London Working Men's Association, and 'the Charter,' a name given to the projected Reform Bill by the latter, was drawn up by Wm. Lovett; who was to have had the coöperation of Mr. Roebuck, but the latter was too much engaged. The six points of the Charter were the old recommendations of the Westminster Committee, under Charles James Fox, in 1780; except—Manhood Suffrage came before Annual Parliaments. The Charter's six points were:

1. MANHOOD SUFFRAGE.
2. ANNUAL PARLIAMENTS.
3. VOTE BY BALLOT.
4. ABOLITION OF PROPERTY QUALIFICATION.
5. PAYMENT OF MEMBERS.
6. EQUAL ELECTORAL DISTRICTS.

The "property qualification" consisted of landed property to the extent of £500 per annum; the consequence of which was that every member of Parliament was, by this

fact, more or less linked with the cause of the land and the landowners. Annual Parliaments, it was contended, would do away with all the bribery and corruption involved in Septennial Parliaments; as it would be impossible for any one to go to such expense yearly.

It was a very reasonable proposition itself, and already some of the points have been gained, as, for instance, the abolition of the property qualification, and the ballot; while every new reform has lowered the franchise; and the redistribution of seats is proceeding in the direction taken in the Charter of equal electoral districts. The payment of members and annual elections will come; as the principle is recognized that to be a member of Parliament is not an honour, and, too often, a sinecure for some local magnate, but a serious occupation dealing with the vessel of the State—with national interests. But if the Charter in itself was a very innocent affair, the movement was fraught with

dangerous elements. At once class hatreds, class interests, and all the dissatisfied elements in the country took sides. From a mere political movement amongst those who were sincerely interested in the subject of parliamentary reform, it soon became a rolling stream, involving every opponent of the existing Government—honest or dishonest. The decision of ‘Finality John’ awoke a national hurricane, some of the effects of which will be seen in these pages. There were soon two great divisions of the Chartists—the ‘moral force’ men, who trusted to ‘Truth and Reason;’ and the ‘physical force’ men, who were prepared to resort to violence. And hunger soon brought violence. The winter of 1837-38 was a severe one, and corn kept steadily rising. Trade was bad, and wages low. A cry arose from the hungry, who joined the Chartists for the simple reason that they were ‘against the Government.’ What says a Chartist pamphlet of this time? ‘The first edition of the Charter was published in 1838. It

may be well to state that such was the respect entertained by great numbers of the middle classes in favour of the exertions of the Working Men's Associations in the great work of political and social reform at that period, that the first meeting called in London in support of the Peoples' Charter, was called by requisition of the electors of Westminster, and holden in Palace Yard, the High Bailiff presiding. We regret, however, to state that all these growing promises of good, tending to the union of the two classes in favour of reform, were frustrated by the blustering and fighting projects of the physical force party, who had hitherto been engaged in the Anti-Poor Law agitation.' That is, the reformers were joined by the insubordinate elements of society, and, most unfortunately, by the mass of ignorance, idleness, and rowdyism, which had hitherto fought against the new Poor Law. And the rise in the price of bread from bad harvests, simultaneously with a fall in wages from bad

trade, brought want to bear on this seething mass of misery and insubordination ; and threats of violence were freely used at their meetings. Of course some of the wilder and less discreet reformers fanned the passions of the rabble, with the design to frighten the Government into yielding to their demands. Torch-light meetings were held, to which many went armed ; pikes were made by the hundred by village blacksmiths ; and in some districts, especially over the manufacturing area of the North, firearms were freely purchased. Violence, too, did here and there take the form of riot ; as in Newport, near the Welsh coal region ; in Birmingham, and elsewhere ; while a diabolical plot to burn down Sheffield was set on foot in the winter of 1839-40, of which somewhat more will be seen further on. Wild terror seized upon a large portion of the community, which added to the general national anxiety. The Government trusted to its soldiers ; the physical force party furbished up their

(pikes and cleaned their guns. / It is very difficult for us, living in peace and security, to conceive the condition of society at that time. There was reform in the air; and many believed that the passing of the Charter would be followed by the repeal of the Corn Laws, and all the other laws which pressed unfairly or hardly upon the masses. But, as usual, it was hunger which bred violence. From the passing of the Reform Bill till the time of want there was no rioting and bloodshed. The return of want brought violence in its train. After the series of bad harvests passed away, the Chartists held meetings and conventions; but there was none of the wild schemes then which marked the times of famine. It was when they were 'clemming' the work-people of the North / became wolfish.

What sayeth our great contemporary historian of those terrible times? 'Wide and almost universal discontent among the working-classes in town and country,

still helped to swell the Chartist ranks. The weavers and stockingers in some of the manufacturing towns were miserably poor. Wages were low everywhere. In the agricultural districts the complaints against the operation of the new Poor Law were vehement and passionate; and although they were unjust in principle, and sustained by monstrous exaggerations of statement, they were none the less potent as recruiting agents for Chartism. There was also a profound distrust of the middle class and their leaders. (It is clear that at that time the Chartists, who represented the bulk of the artisan class in most of the large towns, did to their very hearts believe that England was ruled for the benefit of aristocrats and millionnaires, who were absolutely indifferent to the sufferings of the poor. It is equally clear that most of what were called the ruling class did really believe the English working men who joined the Chartist movement to be a race of fierce, unmanageable, and selfish communists, who, if they were allowed

their own way for a moment, would prove themselves determined to overthrow throne, altar, and all established securities of society. An ignorant panic prevailed on both sides.' Yes: and a very real panic existed in the breasts of the timid, and certainly among the female element, in the middle and upper classes.

Of course it cannot be denied that a number among the Chartists were wild demagogues fond of hearing their own voices; not very particular about what they said, provided they carried their hearers with them; and far from averse from a row. A more limited number talked open sedition and handled their weapons in private.

The Government were embarrassed, and Lord Melbourne was not the man adapted to disturbed times. Though the Duke of Wellington was opposed to the Government, the country placed its confidence in him to maintain order if the riotous feeling broke out into open civil war. The Tories taunted

the Whigs with having begot Chartism by the agitation for reform. Macaulay put their argument so—‘The country is not in a satisfactory state. There is much recklessness, much turbulence, much craving for political change; and the cause of these evils is the policy of the Whigs. They rose to power by agitation in 1830; they retained power by means of agitation through the tempestuous months which followed; they carried the Reform Bill by means of agitation; expelled from office, they forced themselves in again by means of agitation, and now we are paying the penalty of their misconduct. Chartism is the natural offspring of Whigism. From those who caused the evil we cannot expect the remedy. The first thing to be done is to dismiss them, and to call to power men who, not having instigated the people to commit excesses, can, without incurring the charge of inconsistency, enforce the laws.’ Such indeed forms a complete confession of faith in the matter for men like Squire

Wharton, who were quite honest in their belief.

The determination of the Whig Government, as expressed by 'Finality John,' led to a counter-manifestation by the reforming party which plunged the country into disorder, aggravated by the general distress from scarcity of food. A man who remembers this time well told this story to the writer :—'I was living in Bucks then ; we had a pretty big garden, and a pig, with a side of bacon always hanging up. The loaf was fourteen pence, and we could not afford bread, it was too dear ; so we put a piece of fat bacon in the pot, and a cabbage, and then a lot of potatoes, and boiled them all together. And so we did without bread.' But how about those who did not have the pig, and a big garden ? There was a substratum of hunger on which the agitator could work, and did work with success. An empty stomach inclines a man to listen to an argument which promises to fill it, which would never touch him when his

stomach was fairly full. Wild harangues consequently were readily and greedily hearkened to. Machinery was fast coming into use, while the population was equally rapidly increasing. There was a large unemployed body of youths, rash, foolish, ready to follow any unwise counsel. Nor did the unwise counsel always proceed from honest reformers. Their opponents had hired traitors in their ranks, urging violence, advocating the appeal to force, keeping up the general state of terror. There were paid agitators going about telling the people that the new Poor Law was a system of legalized murder, and that children were being slowly tortured to death by the mill-owners. Charges and counter-charges, hired agitators and mad physical force Chartists, all were at work on a people almost frenzied. The manufacturing class pointed to the Corn Laws as the main cause of the troubles of the times ; while the landed interest was equally confident that the mill-owners only wished the repeal of the Corn Laws to pull

down wages. Looking round everywhere, the true reformer saw in improved laws the only cure for the unhealthy social condition. With the Charter all would be put right. The masses groaned under the tyranny of the upper ten thousand, and speech was found for them in words like these :—

‘ Here too, O Queen, thy woe-worn people feel
The load they bear is *more* than they can bear !
Beneath it twenty million workers reel !
While fifty thousand idlers rob and glare,
And mock the sufferings which they yet may share.’

Their misery may have made them unjust ; but the masses were penetrated through and through with the belief that Government was all against the many, and in favour of the few.

But it would be unfair to represent the Chartists as everywhere tending to violence. In certain towns, Birmingham, and some in the north, undoubtedly rioting went on, and property was destroyed ; or the house of an obnoxious magistrate was sacked, or burned down ; or midnight meetings were

held by torchlight, to which many went armed, probably with no more serious intent than a boyish delight in the possession of a weapon. Much depended, doubtless, on local leaders and the prominent members of the Radical associations which were scattered all over the land, and which took up the Charter in all its entirety and in all earnestness. At most of the places the reformers confined themselves to peaceful means of attaining their ends—at most shouting and marching in procession, singing hymns and rhymes of their own. Indeed the Chartists possessed a literature of their own in this respect. Thomas Cooper tells us how the weavers and stockingers of Leicester behaved. He secured a room, the Shakesperian room, and organized a Sunday-school for men and boys who were at work all the week. Those who knew a little willingly taught those who knew less, and the room was filled morning and evening. Their classes bore fancy names, as the ‘Algernon Sidney’ class, the ‘John

Hampden' class, and the 'William Tell' class. Many became teetotallers, and pledged themselves to abstain from all drink till the 'People's Charter' became the law of the land. Then they got on to holding their meetings on one or two week-days in the evening, after work-hours. Some of them with a poetical turn composed songs, while Cooper gave lectures on interesting and instructive topics. They had two newspapers of their own. When work grew slack, in the summer evenings he would lead the poverty-stricken stocking-ers out into the roads outside the town, and into the neighbouring villages, singing and marching along—quite peaceably. From natural pulpits of rock sermons were delivered to the assembled crowds, just as in outdoor camp-meetings, such as Wesley called together. On having nothing to do, the poor stockings would gather round his house in an evening, and he would make them a speech, or form them into a procession, and start them off, sing-

ing, 'The Lion of Freedom has come from his den,' or

'Spread, spread the Charter—

Spread the Charter through the land !

Let Britons bold and brave join hand in hand.'

He says, 'Our singing through the streets in the fine evenings, often accompanied with shouts for the Charter, had no harm in it, though many of the shop-keepers would shut up their shops in real or affected terror. This only caused our men to laugh, since they all knew there was no thought of injuring anybody.' And more or less the same was the case over the whole area, from the valley of the Trent away to and across the Scotch border to the Tay. Over the whole manufacturing area all was ferment; the one subject of conversation was the Charter or the Corn Law repeal.

'It was not simply a few poor ragged Chartists at Leicester who were expecting a change. It was expected in all the industrial regions. Agitation under the influence of the powerful League was rife all over

the midland and the northern counties. Manufacturers declared things could not go on much longer as they were. They began to threaten they would close their mills; or, as the Tories interpreted these threats, to try to precipitate a revolution.' Hopes ran high then which were never realized. Leaders were not, however, all good, clear-headed men like Cooper. The great leader, Feargus O'Connor, the editor of the great Chartist newspaper, 'The Northern Star,' was a hot-headed, fiery Irishman, fond of a row of any kind; and as ready to go in for a battle of fists as for a war of words. Chartist conventions were held, and some very foolish propositions were made. But it was amidst the young, excitable town populations, the sons of immature parents, that riots obtained. Over the face of the country the advocates of the people's Charter were intelligent artisans, like Jim Woodcock, serious, earnest men, who firmly believed that in parliamentary reform was to be found the remedy, the panacea for all

hardships and all wrongs. Unfortunately, however, the riots, the excesses of these town populations filled people's minds with terror. There was the 'ignorant panic,' and all people who loved order, and especially all timid persons who lived in dread of lawlessness, exaggerated the deeds and intentions of a body of men who were, as a rule, honest, hard-handed artisans, who were engaged in seeking their rights. Such men as these were rather the backbone of the working-classes than the scum of society—men too who were in advance of their time, many of whom have survived to see one bit after another of their end attained. The constant tendency of legislation has gone in the direction of the Charter, only piecemeal and not *en masse*. We look back with surprise blended with horror at times so near to us,—yet so far away.

At this time, however, it was terribly earnest, when the hard times of famine in a bread-taxed epoch were added to political excitement; then came

a period of great social disturbance and suffering.

‘And still they pass, and shade on shade
Deepens their woe-marked path along ;
But Thou, O God, art strong to aid :
Ay, and in Thee the weak are strong.’

Free thought might be rampant among the Chartists in some areas ; but their poetry in many cases indicated a sound, healthy, living faith in Providence. A strange weird time in our history is the epoch of the Chartist agitation.

This chapter may to many readers seem dry and outside the story. But without a sufficient comprehension of the precise facts the reader will scarcely follow the plot, or conceive its realism. Acquaintance with what was then going on will enable the more careful reader to grasp the whole more completely. It will be a bad day for fiction when careful readers no longer open the pages of a novel ; though no doubt much of modern fiction is unknown to the better class of readers.

CHAPTER XII.

YES OR NO ?

STEPHEN OLDFIELD pondered carefully over what the Squire had said to him, and especially his last remark about girls being skittish when they did not know their own minds. He was sincerely anxious to secure Miss Wharton's acceptance of him for various reasons. No one could know the girl without perceiving her sterling worth. She possessed, too, much self-respect—so much that she would never forget herself. There was no fear of her ever committing herself; her mother's lessons had sunk too deeply into a mind naturally fitted to receive them, and retain them. This weighed potently with so prudent and circumspect a personage as Stephen Oldfield, a county

magistrate, who was very likely one day to be pricked for sheriff, to whom the idea of conjugal folly was especially distasteful. Cupid in this case sat on a firm stool of common sense; and in his love-making even the prudent man allows his judgment to weigh with him. Beyond all this he had a genuine admiration for the beautiful blonde, the high-spirited girl. Indeed, he liked her all the better for the district-visiting, as an evidence of individuality; though he was anxious to put a stop to it, in what he veritably believed to be the interests of the girl herself.

But, on the other hand, he could not bear the idea of rejection. His vanity dreaded any such mortification, and his self-pride recoiled from the possibility of such a humiliation. Then hope came in with the flattering suggestion that Miss Wharton was no flirt; she had now for some time past permitted of attentions too marked to allow of any mistake about them. Hope and fear, love and prudence, chased

each other over his mental processes—one day one being in the ascendant, another day another. The oscillations were almost rhythmic. A day of hope was almost always followed by one of doubt. In this he shared the lot of all lovers; except those who are swept away on a flood-tide of complacent conceit, without a question or a doubt; often to be rudely dispelled, however, at last. Time wore on, and the opportunity seemed never to offer itself. Miss Oldfield shared in all her brother's hopes and fears, and was almost as anxious about the result as himself. She was very desirous of seeing Edith Wharton her sister-in-law. She had even decided to accept her as the future mistress of Orton Hall, and to become a practical cypher where she now for years had ruled—no easy decision for a woman; especially when she means honestly to abide by it.

As to Miss Wharton herself, it is not easy to describe her state of mind. That Mr. Oldfield would some day make her a formal proposal she knew well; and never

attempted to disguise the fact from herself. She was no flirt: she was an honest, truthful girl, free from any desire to trifle with a man's feelings; who lived before flirting had become regarded as a legitimate pastime for men and maidens,—and perhaps widows too. She had no low motives of seeing how far she could bring her suitor under her influence, to fling his love away when the time of offering it came; no callous delight in torturing a man who is weak enough to admire her, such as some girls indulge in. She was too old-fashioned, as well as too honourable, to calmly calculate that Mr. Oldfield was one string to her bow, who could be utilized if no more attractive string came to hand. She liked him; he had never done anything to forfeit her regard; his assumption of some shadowy authority over her, and her actions, had never done more than slightly chafe at times; while his attentions were not disagreeable, at least as a rule. Yet her feelings were vague and chaotic.

Perhaps she felt it unmaidenly to calculate upon an offer which had not been made. Possibly she felt that it would be time to consider the question seriously when it seemed imminent. It is certain that she had not systematically studied the males of her acquaintance, and weighed each carefully in her mental balance, and had each ticketed with his precise value down to pennyweights, ready against an emergency ; as it is said is not unknown to the present practical generation. She knew she was good-looking. It was impossible that a lady so neat in her attire, so particular about her appearance, could consult her mirror so rigorously, and not know her own features ; and what they were like. But she had never subjected them to any definite appraisalment for the matrimonial market. Further, she had been deeply impressed with what she had seen, and become familiar with in company with Mrs. Pryor. Her mind was in no mood to contemplate matrimony in a light and airy manner as a

woman's ultimate destiny. Life had looked a little too serious to her of recent times to approach so grave a subject in a spirit of levity. She had indeed rather been inclined to put the subject away from her. The condition of the times was such that a proposal was not likely to be made to her by Mr. Oldfield, she thought ; that is, if she thought about the subject at all, as perhaps she did, but, if so, very occasionally. She did not know what motives were prompting that gentleman to take action, out of the best of feelings towards her ; if not quite disinterestedly !

However the eventful moment came, and rather in the nature of a surprise to each. Mr. Oldfield called at Fowrass Grange one day, and found Miss Wharton alone. She had been busy at the Grange Farm, and having laid aside her outdoor wraps was clad in a simple grey linsey-woolsey dress, perfectly plain ; which set off her fine and rather stately figure to advantage. The exertion she had undergone had lent a little

colour to her usually pale cheek, which became her well. She carried herself with her usual stateliness, but her step seemed even more springy than was habitual to it. Her healthy vigorous womanhood was no less obvious than her personal charms. Mr. Oldfield gazed upon her with an admiration which, unnoticed by its object, made the pulsations of his heart plainly felt by him.

The usual conventional conversation having been discharged, Mr. Oldfield felt he must take the momentous plunge. 'I was wishful to see you alone, Miss Wharton. I have something important to say to you ; important to me ; and to you too, I venture to think.'

'I shall be glad to listen to what you have to say,' was the ready reply. For she scarcely thought anything more involved than some social affair on which he wished to take her opinion without consulting her brother about the matter ; and so wished to see her alone. Had she anticipated a

proposal, her tones might have been less possessed and calm.

This looked like, or at least sounded like, encouragement; and in times of tension, when hope and doubt are struggling for mastery, the ear is very sensitive to a tone.

‘I am glad you can listen to me. The matter is one which has occupied my mind. You must be aware of your attractions, your charms, Miss Wharton!’ The announcement came upon her as a surprise carrying with it a full consciousness of its import. She gave a perceptible start, but did not break the brief silence. Mr. Oldfield went on: ‘Nor can you, I venture to think, be unaware of the state of my feelings towards you. They have been manifest for some time, so as to be unmistakable.’ This was rather coldblooded love-making; but Mr. Oldfield became painfully aware of his stature, and realized that there was no courting that grand Alrunen-maiden in the manner in which these must have been

courted, wooed, and won by their Norse warrior-suitors, who put an arm round them, firm and strong, the muscles hardened by toil and warfare; their natural boldness of mind developed by a warlike career. Perhaps, for once, he would have liked to have added a cubit to his stature. In an emergency he fell back instinctively on his habitual caution. He hesitated.

Miss Wharton looked calm and composed; but it cannot be said that she felt either. Her first offer is a momentous matter to a girl; even when she has made up her mind to say "Yes." But in this instance the lady had no such prejudgment of the case in her mind. There was much to be said in favour of Mr. Oldfield; and she knew her uncle would be very glad if she accepted him. She felt a momentary chilliness, as if a cold draught of air had suddenly fallen upon her—a slight nervousness, in fact, as she answered:

‘I had not thought of them in that

light. I always looked upon you as an intimate friend.'

This was quite true as regards the last statement. Was the first quite true? A stern moralist might raise some doubts; but the writer believes that the verdict of his lady-readers will give the lady the benefit of the doubt. In the whirl of a proposal it is impossible to dot every 'i' and cross every 't.' Mr. Oldfield realized that his position was a doubtful one.

'I have felt for some time past that I should like to stand on some nearer relationship than that of a friend, Miss Wharton. I have examined my own feelings, and find that my feeling towards you is a warmer one—indeed is that of love itself.'

Here he ventured to take her hand, which felt cold and marbly. It lay impassive in his, listless, and without its usual firm touch, for a moment; and then was gently, but firmly withdrawn.

'I have further noted your behaviour,

and I have dared to think that the feeling was returned. May I ask if it is so ?'

This last was said with a passionate emphasis, unlike the usual guarded accents of the speaker. Miss Wharton was moved.

'I wish you had not thought so!' she replied.

'Why?'

'Because I fear you have made a mistake.'

This was said very quietly and slowly; the speaker experiencing a slight shiver.

'Mistake! Miss Wharton. It is impossible. I have watched you carefully. I cannot be mistaken!'

'I fear you are,' she said gravely.

'Do not say so; please do not say so; it is impossible, Miss Wharton; you cannot imagine what my feelings are towards you, when you speak so coldly. No; I cannot be mistaken. I have carefully watched your every word, its emphasis, and every action and gesture. Surely I cannot be mistaken!' The energy with which this was uttered

made Miss Wharton look at her suitor with a more intense scrutiny. She saw how terribly in earnest he was. His eyes were dilated as he rivetted his gaze upon her; they almost seemed to speak in their expectancy. His features were set; the long upper lip was compressed, yet seemed to quiver faintly. His whole attitude was that of a man at the utmost point of tension. She could not remain unaffected by the sight. Her sympathies were distinctly aroused; her pity for him grew strong within her. But, with these, other feelings were stirred. Hers was not the nature to throw away the past and the future at the dictate of the present, however imperative. It was not that emotional, impulsive nature, to be swept away in a current of feeling over which her judgment could exercise no control. Her will was not powerless; though the strain upon it was painful to bear. She spoke very quietly, as she said:

‘My feelings towards you are those of a

friend—a sincere friend. But, Mr. Oldfield, friendship is not love !’

‘ But friendship may grow into love !’ he gasped desperately ; ‘ your friendliness will grow into something more ; I feel a conviction of it, Miss Wharton. You cannot have inquired of your own heart—search it again—this cannot be true.’ A hurricane of emotion passed over the little gentleman, so unlike his wonted gravity ; he seemed positively shaken with his emotion.

Miss Wharton felt the position becoming intensely painful. It cut her to the heart to see her old friend so troubled, when a word of hers could put him at ease. It was only a word ; but that word she could not speak. The feeling within her grew stronger and stronger ; that to say ‘ yes ’ to end a painful scene was a sacrifice which could not be made, it would not be fair to either. With a mighty effort, she answered :

‘ Mr. Oldfield, it distresses me very much to see you ; to hear you. I am so sorry this has happened. Could not the mistake

have been prevented? Why have I not foreseen this; and so have prevented it?’

‘Do not say so, Miss Wharton; do not say that. Why should it not be as I wish? Why can you not love me? Oh, tell me that?’

The intense emotion with which these words were uttered told of the amount of earnestness which underlay the habitual reserve.

‘My feelings are not such as to warrant my saying that they are love. They are friendship; but nothing more.’

‘Could you not think of it in time? Think it over, Miss Wharton. I have taken you by surprise. I will wait till another time—till you have considered the matter.’

The eager gaze, the tremulous tones, the tight clutch on her hand, testified to the speaker’s earnestness.

‘I fear it is useless. You ask what will make no change. Time will not change friendliness to love.’

She looked at him firmly, but kindly.

‘You have not given your love to another?’ he asked hoarsely, with intense suspense.

‘I have not,’ was the steady response ; as if the speaker were glad to assuage the terrible agony which it went to her heart to witness.

‘Thank heaven for that, Miss Wharton. I have hope—indeed I have.’ This one gleam of comfort was like a flash of sunlight through a rift in a black bank of cloud. Its momentary comfort soothed the agitated suitor, and he continued : ‘I can live in hope ; I will wait with patience.’ He seemed bowed and broken with the trial to which his self-command had just been exposed. He felt as if rest were at hand. ‘You will listen to me at another time. You do not know how complete is my love for you.’

What was Miss Wharton to do?—the position was most embarrassing. To inflict pain upon Mr. Oldfield was the last thing in her thoughts. She would willingly save

him pain. She was suffering herself. She knew that. But she also realized that her suffering was as nothing to his. Her heart was not a hard one; it was full of sympathy for suffering. She halted, she hesitated; she felt she ought not to leave him under a false impression; she ought to let him know precisely her position. No change of feeling was to be looked for; she felt it was her duty to say so. But she did not say it. Her womanly pity for the man so utterly humbled before her; her remembrance of the many kindnesses she had received at his hands; perhaps the subtle flattery of love to which it is said a woman can never be utterly deaf, or insensible, pleaded for him. In the conflict within her she felt unable to destroy his last hope. It may have been weakness — contemptible weakness. It may have been positively wrong. Woman must be her judge. Man can find valid extenuating circumstances for her conduct. After a pause, she replied:

‘ I will think it over.’

‘How I thank you from the bottom of my heart! You will think it over. How good of you!’ The reaction came, and from the depths of despair his hope bounded upwards. ‘I may hope, then!’

But Miss Wharton had no intention to deliberately deceive. Her answer had been wrested from her by the terrible strain on her feelings. It was said rather as an escape from a position that was growing intolerable, than as encouragement to Mr. Oldfield to persevere. She saw the error, and tried to amend it.

‘I will think it over, as you request; but I cannot say that there is much prospect of my decision being altered. I must be truthful to you, Mr. Oldfield.’

Here once more the ordinary calmer, more rational, less intense, feelings were beginning to take the place of the high-strung emotion which had held a complete, if brief, sway over both. The usurpation of passion was yielding to less absorbing considerations. Mr. Oldfield became conscious

of the alteration—the change. It favoured him. The significance of hesitation under circumstances of this nature is universally recognized. Hope will whisper through the narrowest chink.

‘ You are always truthful, Miss Oldfield. It is your very truthfulness which has made you distrust your own feelings at the present. You will find, as you examine yourself, that your feelings are warmer than you yourself can all at once realize. I feel a strong trust that time will work for me.’

The tones of his voice told of returning confidence ; hope was gaining the ascendant. Miss Wharton felt this was really unwarranted. In the rapid self-communing of the past few minutes she could find no feeling in her heart she could call love. But she could not dash his rising hopes utterly to the ground. She permitted him to go on without a check ; as she ought not to have done, doubtless ; but then she was young, very inexperienced, — and this was her first offer. She was thinking of the poor

man's suffering at the immediate present. She was not thinking of how her conduct would look when she came to inspect it after a distinct lapse of time,—when the emotions had calmed down.

‘Do not be too certain of that, Mr. Oldfield,’ was all she managed to say.

‘But I do feel so. I am sure you will see the matter as I do, Edith. May I not call you Edith, Miss Wharton, in future?’

This was very natural: but it flashed across the girl's mind that this was a familiarity that could only give rise to erroneous and false impressions; could only lead others to believe that their relations were other than they really were. She saw the danger, and replied:

‘I have no special objection to your doing so. But do you think it desirable to make any change at present?’

This allusion to the future again struck him; and he concluded it augured well for him. Everything referring to the future seemed to be in his favour.

‘I will not be in haste to use the privilege,’ he replied. ‘But may I not think of you as Edith?’ This was a still further decline towards strictly conventional love-making; and Miss Wharton felt it to be so, clearly and positively.

‘I can exercise no control over your thoughts, Mr. Oldfield. But I must ask you not to let your thoughts pass your lips. May I in turn ask this?’

‘You may indeed. I thank you sincerely for your permission. I shall still think of you as possibly mine. Do you know, Miss Wharton, I have already ascertained the views of your family on this matter?’ Miss Wharton again started. This was new to her indeed. She felt somewhat angry at the announcement; and yet it was only what she might have expected.

‘You surprise me,’ she said, rather haughtily. The tone struck him. She was indignant evidently, and resented this action. He saw the tide of feeling was

turning against him; and he tried to retrieve his error. So he continued:

‘I felt it my duty to gain the permission of your brother and your uncle; to ascertain if my proposition would meet with their approval, before I spoke to you on the momentous subject.’ Here Mr. Oldfield was taking the vulpine track habitual to him. Miss Wharton saw clearly how by so doing, and having gained their consent, he had practically their sanction; and that in declining his proposal she placed herself in a certain antagonism to her family. She felt as if he had stolen a march upon her. Her temper was none of the mildest: and she fired up as these thoughts flashed through her mind like lightning; as thoughts will in times of intense feeling.

‘You may have secured their consent; but you have not yet gained mine. You understand that!’

He did understand indeed the words, and the tone in which they were uttered. His

faculties, never dull, were sharpened by the emergency. He saw she was angry.

‘I could not have done otherwise, Miss Wharton. I could not have spoken to you without having first ascertained if such action would be agreeable to your relatives.’ Miss Wharton felt that he had reason upon his side in this; and a reaction set in, based on the feeling that she might have been unjust in the suspicion which prompted her harsh remark.

‘You were quite right, I admit. But it does not follow that I must yield to the wishes of my brother and my uncle.’

‘I never hinted at such a thing, I assure you. I merely wished you to understand that my present action is no momentary impulse; but the result of deliberate thought, Miss Wharton. Do not misunderstand me.’

His appeal to the generous element in her nature was successful; and Mr. Oldfield observed the effect, and continued:

‘If you knew, Miss Wharton—Edith! all that has gone on in my mind; all the

thought that has told me how my love for you has become a part of my existence,—you would not put my love away from you.’

‘I have not put it away from me, Mr. Oldfield. I have told you that my feelings are those of friendship; not of love. Our feelings are not at beck and call. They do not obey us: we have to obey them. If your feelings have induced you to offer your hand; mine tell me I cannot accept it.’

‘But you have promised to think the subject over. I may speak to you again at some future day.’

‘I have promised. And you may do so. But I have told you, have warned you, that I do not anticipate any change in my feelings.’

Here he suddenly seized her hand once more; and, before she could withdraw it, he had imprinted on it a kiss. The unexpected act sent a thrill through her; and yet it was not a thrill of delight.

‘I must go now, Mr. Oldfield,’ she said

firmly ; the tone telling him that the interview was ended.

‘ Good-bye, Edith,’ he said. She did not reprove him for using her name. Afterwards she thought she ought to have done so.

Mr. Oldfield left Fowrass Grange with many thoughts and feelings surging through his mind. He felt mortified that he had not been successful. But his wounded pride sought solace in the promise that Miss Wharton had given him to think the matter over, and that he might speak to her again. Her uncle had told him he might not be successful the first time of asking ; he must try again. But his self pride told him that he would not relish failure a second time. He had not been flatly refused. He might call her ‘ Edith.’ He had gained something. He had broken the ice, and she knew the position. Yes ; and he might some day speak to her again. Still the position was far from satisfactory.

It had not been a long scene ; probably

it had only occupied a few minutes. But it already seemed to have saturated his past for years back. Counted by his emotions the interview might have extended over several hours. He felt wearied, as if he had gone through a long struggle. His mind seemed exhausted. He could come to no conclusion; yet the subject occupied his mind to the exclusion of all other topics. When he reached home, his sister's keen eye took in the circumstances in a moment. Her eagerness to know the facts overcame her habitual deference.

‘You have proposed to Miss Wharton, Stephen. What did she say?’ she exclaimed.

‘She said she would think the matter over.’

‘Was that all? I fear she is a trifler. Yet I never thought of her in that light. You surprise me.’

He did not feel inclined, at that time at least, to enter into any details.

As to Miss Wharton, she felt bruised by the episode. It had been a greater trial to

her than she realized while the scene was being enacted. After she had sat down and thought it all over, she felt wounded; and yet she could not well tell in what her sense of injury consisted. Mr. Oldfield had testified his regard for her in the strongest manner that a man can testify his regard; he had offered her his hand. She had rather liked than disliked him. Certainly she did not despise him: the fatal feeling for a lover. Yet as certainly she did not look up to him. There was not that respect which often precedes, and is easily transformed into love. Then she felt that he had rather taken advantage of her in alluding to the permission he had gained from her uncle and her brother. How could her decision be explained to them? What would they think when they came to find out that no engagement existed between them? It was a very awkward dilemma, she felt. What could she say the next time Mr. Oldfield spoke to her? The future seemed no more

attractive than the present. Would she ever like Mr. Oldfield more than she then did? She feared not. And then the image of another rose up in her mind—his tall figure, his earnest mien. If it had been he that had asked her to wait—to think; what would her answer have been? Aye, what would it have been? Who knows!

And so Mr. Oldfield had made his long-deferred proposal to Miss Wharton; and she had not accepted him. What had been gained? Very little! He was stung at not being accepted. She smarted with the sense that her action would be construed into opposition to the wishes of her family. She could not speak to her brother, she thought; but on further reflection she felt she must. What would her brother say? When he came in she went up to him, and nestling her head on his breast, she said:

‘John, Mr. Oldfield has proposed to me.’

He held her firmly, and gazed at her with a searching look.

‘And the result was?’

‘I have not accepted him.’

He folded her in his arms and kissed her. It was evident he was not angry with her.

Such, then, was the position of affairs betwixt the Oldfields and the Whartons, and of the Whartons towards their uncle; when the catastrophe of Tom Earnshaw’s murder came upon them all, and changed the face of affairs profoundly.

END OF VOL. I.

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